

**It's a kind of magic:
exploring the role of the living in effecting food
and drink offerings in private mortuary cults of
late Old Kingdom Egypt**

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Archaeology and Anthropology Degree Committee.

Philippa Jane Browne

December 2019

Thesis summary

It's a kind of magic: exploring the role of the living in effecting food and drink offerings in private mortuary cults of late Old Kingdom Egypt

Food and drink were vital for post-mortem existence in Ancient Egypt, and the presentation of these by the living to the dead at the tomb formed a key part of the mortuary cult. Egyptological scholarship commonly proposes that once the cult ceased, and the temporary, perishable offerings along with it, a permanent, 'magical' supply was provided via image, text, and object representations of sustenance in the tomb. This study examines these 'modes' through which offerings were present and presented.

Complementary theoretical frameworks are employed in case studies that analyse illustrative examples of the offering-related decorations, installations, and objects from a number of elite late Old Kingdom tombs (c.2492-2181 BCE) at Saqqara. These demonstrate that tomb design incorporated different modes to communicate salient information about the cult to the living: it took into account their varying literacy and resource levels – as did the different modes of offerings that they could use to sustain the dead. Modes were therefore deployed to facilitate interaction between the two parties.

The conclusion is that magic (Egyptian *ḥkꜣ/ḥw*) was involved in effecting offerings of all kinds, but that the living played an indispensable role in channelling this force to endow offerings with the capacity to sustain the dead, rather than such agency being inherent. Ongoing cult participation both ensured the effectiveness of the offerings in the tomb, and articulated the social relationships between the worlds of the living and dead.

The study results in a more nuanced understanding of the mortuary cult, explicating the significance of offerings in the articulation of relationships between the living and dead, and establishing the notion of reciprocity as a driving factor. Finally, it suggests that to focus solely on offerings as 'magical/permanent' or 'real/temporary' is to obscure the cult as a social process.

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This work is dedicated to the memory of my three family members who passed away during the course of my PhD: Beatrice ‘Anne’ Sarginson; David Hawes; and John Harle; as well as to the memory of my father, Simon Browne.

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Chronology

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Period	Approximate dates (BCE)	Dynasties
Predynastic Period	5300-3000	
Early Dynastic Period	3000-2686	1-2
Old Kingdom	2686-2160	3-8 ²
First Intermediate Period	2160-2055	9-11 ³
Middle Kingdom	2055-1650	11-14
Second Intermediate Period	1650-1550	15-17
New Kingdom	1550-1069	18-20
Third Intermediate Period	1069-664	21-25
Late Period	664-332	26-30 ⁴

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Name of king	Time period of Old Kingdom
5 th Dynasty (c. 2494-2345 BCE)	
Userkaf	Early (V.E)
Sahure	
Neferirkare	
Shepseskare	Middle (V.M)
Raneferef	
Neuserre	
Menkauhor	Late (V.L)
Djedkare Isesi	
Wenis	
6 th Dynasty (c. 2494-2181)	
Teti	Early (VI.E)
Userkare	
Pepy I	

¹ Chronology from Shaw 2000; for notes on his chronology see ibid. 480.

² Shaw includes various 7th and 8th Dynasty kings in his Old Kingdom chronology.

³ 11th Dynasty Theban rulers only.

⁴ Includes the 1st and 2nd Persian Periods.

⁵ The list of kings and division into periods follows that of Harpur 1987: 33-35 and Roeten 2014: 47-48.

Merenre I	Middle (VI.M)
Pepy II	Late (VI.L)
Merenre II	
Nitocris/Netjerkare Siptah	

Map of Egypt

Map removed for copyright reasons.
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Source: Adapted from Bárta 2011: 13.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

“Magical practices are not merely the plane for the demonstration of a sociological or psychological theory – a folk instance of what we already know – but, for want of a better description, they display a ‘machinery’ of their own, a naïve (unselfconscious) critique and investigation of the way human beings put themselves together socially and psychologically. In this way, they may extend towards a reconsideration of fundamental categories of understanding in the anthropological armoury: of reciprocity, the gift, sociality, and so forth”

(Kapferer 2002: 24).

In Ancient Egypt, post-mortem existence was thought to be sustained predominantly via offerings of food and drink. Therefore, the presentation of such offerings was a key component of ritual activity carried out at the tomb as part of the so-called mortuary cult. The cult was typically performed by the descendants of the tomb owner and/or priests hired for the purpose, but it may have only lasted a few generations⁶. While in theory any passer-by might make offerings to the deceased at any point, Egyptological scholarship commonly proposes that the food and drink-related objects buried with the tomb owner, as well as images and texts relating to food and drink adorning the tomb walls, would ensure a permanent, ‘magical’ supply for the dead, particularly once the temporary, perishable⁷ food and drink offerings of the cult ceased⁸.

This thesis contends that while the force of magic (*ḥkꜣ/ḥw* in Egyptian) was likely used to ‘activate’ the efficacy of food and drink offerings, this applied to both imperishable and perishable offerings. It highlights the indispensable role of the living in this activation, as well as in the maintenance of the tomb environment so that the offerings present and presented within it continued to be effective for the deceased. The ongoing participation of the living in the cult was part of a reciprocal social relationship with the dead, and the tomb was purposefully and carefully designed to encourage and facilitate interaction between the two parties.

I suggest that while it is useful to investigate the concept of magic as related to the operation of offerings, this must be done with the relationship between the living and dead in mind,

⁶ Baines 1991: 147; Baines and Lacovara 2002: 15-16; Froot 2010: 488-89; Shirai 2006: 333.

⁷ I use the term ‘perishable’ offerings to refer to food and drink that could be consumed by the living, and that is prone to natural decay; the term ‘imperishable’ refers to food and drink represented in image, text, and object forms, as well as the verbalisation of food and drink items at the tomb.

⁸ *Inter alia* Allen 2013: 275; Baines and Lacovara 2002: 11-12, citing Barta 1968; Groenewegen-Frankfort 1987: 29-32; Hartwig 2004: 37-39; Snape 2011: 39, 44; Weeks 1979: 61; Zinn 2017: 213-19.

given the implication of the former in effecting sustenance for the latter. To focus *solely* on the nature of offerings as permanent or temporary and/or ‘magical’ or ‘real’ is to obscure the cult as a social phenomenon that articulated the relationship between the living and the dead.

1.i. Research problem

There is little elaboration in the academic literature on the nature and workings of mortuary offerings in Ancient Egypt. A distinction is often drawn between perishable versus imperishable food and drink – the former usually being considered magical and the latter not – without further discussion of why this should be the case. Further still, scholars neglect to clarify whether the designation ‘magical’, when applied to offerings, is to be understood as such from an Egyptian perspective or from their own. These factors hinder a fuller understanding of magic in Ancient Egypt and how it might apply to the various modes of offerings that are attested.

Intertwined with the issue of magic is that of agency: if offerings work in a magical way, were they considered to possess their own, inherent agency to sustain the dead; or did such a capacity to act have to be channelled into offerings by the living from somewhere? Moreover, in the case of the latter (which I argue for), what does this reveal about the relationships between the living, dead, and offerings? I do not attempt to form an all-encompassing model for magical agency, but rather examine its operation in the specific context of Old Kingdom mortuary offerings, with a view to providing a point of departure for further studies.

Within and outside of Egyptology, addressing these questions sheds light not only on conceptualisations of magic and agency, but also on issues of relative ontologies, i.e. the nature of being(s). From a modern, Western perspective, people and ‘things’ are overwhelmingly conceived of as being separate types of entities: animate and sentient versus inanimate and insentient, respectively, with autonomous agency usually being attributed to animate and sentient beings and not to ‘things’ (see Robb 2010: 504-505; 2013: 2). However, the recent ‘material turn’ within the social sciences⁹ has brought into question the validity of such characterisations across societies, geographies, and time periods. Magic may be viewed from a modern, Western perspective as a similarly illogical concept; as something unscientific, rather than an alternative technology, that can only operate in the framework of a fantastical world. Yet, as the opening quote reflects, developments in anthropology in particular are re-shaping such assumptions, pointing towards the potential that new

⁹ See Hicks 2010 for an overview of the ‘material turn’.

approaches have for opening up understandings of magic – and what it means to be human – in societies past and present¹⁰.

An emic exploration of the interrelation of agency and magic is warranted to expand our understanding of how magic is perceived to work from the viewpoint of the culture under consideration, rather than from an imposed etic stance – as far as this is possible. Leading on from this, an investigation into the mechanics of magic in relation to agency is revealing about the perceived abilities of people versus ‘things’ within a given culture. This in turn provides information for more far-reaching future studies into cross-cultural ontologies and, ultimately, constitutes a step towards answering questions of how humans perceive themselves in comparison to other non-human things, and about the ways in which people interact with them to shape and react to their worlds, both social and material.

At a smaller scale, within Egyptology itself, this study enhances our understanding of the mortuary cult during the late Old Kingdom (5th and 6th Dynasties, c. 2492-2181 BCE¹¹), particularly at the site of Saqqara, from where my illustrative examples originate (see next chapter). I present an original and nuanced view of the various offering modes and how they were perceived to function, emphasising the participation of the living and the notion of reciprocity as linchpins in the ongoing operation of the mortuary cult, while clarifying our application of the term ‘magic’ to offerings. Further, I open up avenues of future research for studying the mortuary cult as a social process.

1.ii. Existing literature

A brief overview of the existing literature most pertinent to this study is provided here by way of background, while further discussion is provided in each chapter as relevant.

Bolshakov’s 1997 study examines the Old Kingdom mortuary cult, but according to a very particular understanding of the Egyptian *ka* (*kʿ* in Egyptian, often translated as a person’s ‘life force’ or ‘personality’ and which is connected with the feeding of the deceased¹²). He argues that a ‘Doubleworld’ was created for the benefit of the *ka* through images and texts in the tomb, as representations created ‘*ka* doubles’ of what was depicted – the *ka* itself being revealed through depictions (see 1997: 210-13, 264-67). For example, he suggests that while ‘real’ food and drink could be placed on offering tables in the deceased’s tomb, images of offerings that decorated the tables would “generate eternally the *ka* doubles of the depicted

¹⁰ See Kapferer 2002 for an overview of previous and current anthropological approaches to magic and reason; and Berger (ed.) 2005 regarding magic and witchcraft in contemporary North America.

¹¹ Chronology from Shaw 2000.

¹² See Nyord 2019 for a review of scholarship on the ‘*ka* problem’, including an insightful critique of Bolshakov’s proposed solution, and a suggested new approach to understanding the *ka* concept.

food” (2001: 574). However, Bolshakov does not examine magic¹³, despite the widespread use of the term to describe the operation of offerings, and instead focuses solely on his solution of the ‘Doubleworld’ in this and other publications. Yet, through an exploration of ‘doubles’, Bolshakov’s theory does link the nature of offerings and the dead, and thus attempts to address *how* the deceased could be perceived to be nourished by offerings – a topic that lies outside the confines of my study.

There are many scholarly contributions regarding Old Kingdom tomb decorative programmes, with Part I of Bolshakov’s 1997 work comprising an investigation into the ‘system’ of its representations. Most studies examine design and decoration from a chronological viewpoint and/or centre on offering-related fittings and objects including offering tables, false doors, and ceramic forms¹⁴. The only publication addressing the private mortuary cult from a more holistic angle – including an examination of social strategies employed to ensure its continuation – is Legros’ 2016 work. However, this focuses on the 6th to 12th Dynasties and therefore encompasses only the very end of the Old Kingdom. The intersection of agency and magic in Ancient Egypt remains largely untouched (but see Nyord 2017) and has not been examined in relation to the functioning of the mortuary cult.

That an overlap exists between magic and religion in Ancient Egypt was well established by the turn of the 19th century (for example Erman 1894 and 1907 [1904]; Wallis Budge 1901 [1899]). Subsequently, other general publications have emerged on this topic¹⁵. It was during the mid-1990s that three particularly notable works on Egyptian magic appeared (Eschweiler 1994; Koenig 1994; Ritner 1993)¹⁶ and these do address the mechanics of magic, including the spoken and written word, the materials and ‘ingredients’ employed in magical practices, as well as the significance of imagery in magical acts¹⁷. Hartwig’s 2004 study into the decoration of New Kingdom tombs at Thebes encompasses the magical and commemorative

¹³ Bolshakov does mention magic fleetingly as related to the agency of representations, but only to dismiss it: “Theories ignoring the problem of the ‘life of representations’ (such as the repeatedly expressed opinion on the ‘infantile consciousness’ and ‘magic vitalization’) cannot explain anything and lead us away from the main point... We have to establish what kind of notion existed where we are inclined to see the ‘life of representations’, for some relationship of representations with a certain other reality is beyond any doubt, even though it is not as evident as it seems to be at the first glance” (1997: 135).

¹⁴ For a detailed examination of Old Kingdom tomb design and decorative programmes, see Harpur 1987. For Old Kingdom offering tables, Hölzl 2002 and Mostafa 1982; for the stylistic and chronological development of Old Kingdom false doors, Strudwick 1985, Brovarski 2006, and Wiebach 1981; and for serdabs Lehmann 2000. See Rzeuska 2006 for a catalogue and discussion of the Old Kingdom ceramics from the recent Polish-Egyptian excavations at Saqqara.

¹⁵ For example David 2002; Pinch 1994.

¹⁶ For shorter studies on the topic of Egyptian magic, including Egyptian terms (*ḥkʿ* and *ḥw*) and the god *Heka*, see Borghouts 1980 and 1987; Te Velde 1970.

¹⁷ For the ‘power’ of images in Ancient Egypt, see also Assmann 1990a, who considers ‘monumental’ and ‘magical’ images, as well as the overlap between writing and image.

functions of images in the tomb, but seeks to view the two as separate, rather than interconnected: “Magically, the tomb was a vehicle for the owner’s rebirth, the projection of his identity, and the eternal effectiveness of the deceased’s cult; commemoratively, the tomb offered a place in which the living could celebrate the tomb owner and perpetuate his memory” (ibid. 37). Recently, Nyord has made significant inroads to the study of the topic of temporality in the Old Kingdom tomb and cult, funerary magic carried out with images in the Middle Kingdom period, as well as the concept of the *ka* according to Old and Middle Kingdom texts (2013a, 2017, and 2019, respectively). Nyord’s work takes a theoretically informed approach and it is his work that I draw on in particular.

Egyptologists recognise that a lack of understanding exists concerning the function, reading, and ‘magical’ capacity of Old Kingdom tomb images and have redressed this to some extent¹⁸, whereas others maintain the view that the scenes can be systematized by theme (for example, daily life or cultic type scene types), thus implying that they are straightforward to interpret, without entertaining the possibility of a multiplicity of meanings¹⁹. Roeten’s doctoral dissertation statistically analyses the developments in the decorative themes of the west walls in Old Kingdom tombs at Giza, arguing that a shift took place towards using motifs that could ‘magically’ provide the deceased with nourishment, and away from using a ‘real’ food supply (2011: 172-79). In his later publication²⁰, Roeten does not explicate how images supplied magical provision, save a mention of “magically passive” depictions (2014: 336, footnote 10). However, he does acknowledge that ‘magical’ images were not relied upon as the sole means of supplying the dead; if that were the case, decorated burial chambers or substructures would have sufficed, yet tomb superstructures continued to be decorated and the cult was performed (ibid. 341).

A number of scholars have examined the potency of the written and pronounced word in Ancient Egypt, including the use of metaphor, and although many of these do not centre on Old Kingdom material²¹, some studies have recently been undertaken on the topic in relation to the royal Pyramid Texts²². The operation of other communicative modes in tombs of this period, including objects, has garnered less attention²³, as has the written and spoken word in a non-royal context. However, there are two significant studies concerning written offerings

¹⁸ See Vischak 2003: 133-35 and 2006: 256-57; van Walsem 2005.

¹⁹ See Bolshakov 1997: 40-49; Roeten 2011: 15-16 and 2014: 24-31.

²⁰ A revised version of his dissertation, expanded to include the remaining chapel walls, published 2014.

²¹ *Inter alia* Assmann 2007; Baines 2007; Goldwasser 1995; Hornung 1992.

²² Iannarilli 2018; Popielska-Grzybowska 2011.

²³ While Meskeel has published on the topic of materiality and object biographies in Ancient Egypt, she focuses on the New Kingdom period.

found in Old Kingdom tombs – one on the ‘offering lists’ and the other on the ‘offering formula’²⁴ – and although these contribute to our understanding of the forms and types that these inscriptions take, the studies do not focus on how they were thought to function in respect of feeding the dead.

1.iii. Response to research problem

Whereas Bolshakov approaches the issue of the ability of offerings to nourish the dead from the angle of images and their mimetic faculty, just as Ritner and Eschweiler focus predominantly on images in their treatment of Egyptian magic, my own study considers other ‘modes’ via which offerings were present and presented in the Old Kingdom tomb: text and object, as well as voice and gesture. As the topic is complex and multi-faceted, I adopt a ‘thought experiments’ approach in order to ‘think through’ the various modes and how they operate, which entails drawing on a number of theoretical approaches (see **Section 2.iii**). This leads to the conclusion that adopting a multimodal, social semiotic approach, informed by phenomenological and cognitive considerations, is the most promising route towards a clearer understanding of how various modes are perceived to operate in Ancient Egypt, in relation to both the living and the dead, as well as to the social relationship between the two parties.

My study examines illustrative examples of the offering modes under investigation from a selection of late Old Kingdom elite tombs at Saqqara, demonstrating that the actions of cult participants were vital for effecting the sustenance of the deceased. Through the notion of ‘modal affordances’²⁵ (the abilities of different modes to communicate information) and by drawing on the concept of ‘implied motion’ adopted from cognitive neuroscience²⁶, I examine how internal and external tomb decoration imparted salient information to tomb visitors regarding where and how to participate in the offering cult. I also investigate the physical affordances (action possibilities) of tomb installations and objects, arguing that the tomb was designed in order to promote and facilitate ongoing cult action from the living.

Following a consideration of the Egyptian conceptualisation and application of magic, the characterisation of only certain offering modes as ‘magical’ is refuted, as is the notion that

²⁴ The so-called ‘offering formula’ is an extremely common genre of formulaic text found on objects and monuments in Ancient Egypt, comprising four main parts: the *hṯp-dī-nīswt* (the ‘king’s formula, denoting that the king allows offerings to come forth for the recipient); the gods’ formula (naming certain deities who permit the offerings); a list of the offerings; and the name and titles of the recipient (see Franke 2003: 39; Lapp 1986). Old Kingdom offering formulae often include a request for the *pṛt-hrw* to be made for the deceased (Franke 2003: 46).

²⁵ See Kress 2010; Van Leeuwen 2005.

²⁶ See Cattaneo et al. 2017; Kourtzi and Kanwisher 2000; Pavan et al. 2011.

offerings possessed inherent agency. I show that agency of offering modes stemmed from the Egyptian force of magic, but that this had to be channelled by the living in order to activate such agency. Moreover, the living played a necessary role in maintaining the effectiveness of the tomb environment, and hence of the offerings present and presented there, via ritual actions. The importance placed on the living coming to the tomb site to make offerings is further underscored by a consideration of the ‘hierarchy’ of offering modes: perishable goods offered by the living are found to have been considered most preferable for sustaining the deceased.

Finally, this study establishes future research questions, with a particular view to investigating the mortuary cult as a social forum for managing the changing relationships between the living and the dead over time, and to pursuing questions concerning the intersection of communicative modes, ‘magical’ agency, and relative ontologies in Ancient Egypt and other societies.

1.iv. Limitations

This study is limited to a particular time period and geographical area, as well as to certain tombs within that area. The tombs examined here were built for elite males, while some were re-used (one by a royal female) and others not. Incomplete preservation and also the disturbance of finds and features are issues for all of the tombs, with the result that some of the images, texts, and objects have not survived or were not found in situ.

Although every effort has been made to select tombs that have been published or re-published in recent decades, the key publications for two tombs (Ty, and the joint tomb of Ptahhotep and Akhethotep) are much older. Even in the case of the recent tomb publications, detailed colour images of all features are not always included (Merefnebef and Nyankhneferitem excepted) and in-depth notes on some issues of interest – especially the white coating on tomb features and objects, and detailed descriptions of serdab²⁷ slits – are lacking. While I was able to visit several tombs in person to take my own photographs and field notes²⁸, many others were closed for conservation. Therefore, I make use of the photographs and commentary shared online by Thierry Benderitter (www.osirisnet.net), who has been able to access some of the tombs unavailable to me²⁹.

²⁷ The serdab is a sealed room in which statues of the deceased (and sometimes family members and dependents, and/or other objects) were enclosed.

²⁸ The tombs of Akhethotep and Ptahhotep, Mereruka, Nikauisesi, Ty, and Ihy/Idut.

²⁹ Information regarding the website and its creator is available at https://osirisnet.net/e_centrale.htm and https://osirisnet.net/e_auteur.htm, respectively.

Certain offering-related objects are not examined in detail in my study. These comprise model and miniature offering vessels, model foodstuffs, so-called meat boxes, and vessels containing ‘false’ fillings. There are a number of reasons why these could not themselves form the basis of a case study: some were not attested (or only attested once) in the finds from my selected tombs, or were attested in fragmentary form; some were found in contexts too disturbed to ascertain their origin (this is the case particularly for burial shafts and chambers); and some are not well published. However, recent studies into Old Kingdom model and miniature vessels have been conducted by Arias Kytnarová, Jirásková, and Odler (2018), Arias Kytnarová (2018), Jirásková (2017), as well as Allen (2006 and 2013). In future, a study of such objects as related to the magical provision of mortuary offerings, including through mimetic or substitutive acts, could be revealing.

The physical affordance approach adopted in this study relies on the assumption that tomb visitors are mobile enough to move through the tomb, use stepped approaches, and participate physically in the cult by using gestures and/or offering-related goods and equipment. The examination of decoration, which in part employs cognitive neuroscience, also assumes that visitors were sighted and could fully process visual stimuli. Related to vision is the issue of lighting: low levels of lighting in a tomb would render some representations difficult to see, and tomb visitors might have needed to use a light source to view these. Further, a basic level of cultural knowledge would have been required by passers-by and visitors to the tomb in order to understand the function and features of a tomb superstructure. Nonetheless, the communicative modes employed in tomb decoration would, as is argued, assist with the navigation of the tomb and types of activity to be carried out there.

Chapter 2. Background

2.i. The mortuary cult

Prior to articulating the data, method, and methodology employed, I will provide an introduction to the private mortuary cult in Ancient Egypt. An outline of themes central to the cult³⁰ provides a background against which to situate this study.

Rather than viewing the tomb in Ancient Egypt as a ‘passive’ structure, it should be considered as an ‘active’ or a ‘generative’ site, and one which materialises myriad relations that extend across time horizons. A tomb can be understood as a liminal space in which different spheres of existence meet, and in which the living and dead can come into contact with one another (Harrington 2013: 86-88; Hartwig, 2013: 165).

Various aspects of a person’s existence, including the *bʿ* and *kʿ* – often translated as ‘life force’ and ‘soul/personality/double’, respectively³¹ – were thought to be sustained after death via offerings of food, drink, and other goods (Davies 2018: 59-60; Gordon 1996; Nyord 2019: 160-61, 166, 188-90). I have chosen food and drink offerings as the basis for my study due to their long-standing association with burials, with objects including offering tables, storage jars, foodstuffs, and ‘dummy offerings’ (clay, earth, or sand), being attested from the Predynastic period onwards (Bolshakov 2001: 573-74; Stevenson 2009a: 4-5). The presentation of such offerings at the tomb is a key component of post-mortem ritual activity at the tomb, i.e. the mortuary cult³². Yet the tomb is a site not only for the performance of offering rituals, but also for both biological and ontological transformations³³.

Through ritual practices³⁴, the deceased becomes an *akh* (Egyptian *ʾḫ*), which can be translated as ‘effective spirit’³⁵, and thus exists as a new form of being, one ontologically different from a living person (Nyord 2013a: 196-97). Additionally, Nyord suggests that the metamorphosis of the body, prone to decay, into a more permanent form (i.e. a mummy) mirrors the passage between two Egyptian concepts of time: *nḥh* and *ḏt* (ibid. 201-202).

³⁰ Unless otherwise stated, I am discussing the mortuary cults and tombs of ‘elite’ individuals.

³¹ See Allen 2005: 7 and Harrington 2013: 3-7, 13-15 for general remarks on these concepts; Nyord 2019: 151-56 for an overview of research history on the *ka*; and for the *ba*, Žabkar 1968.

³² But cf. Bolshakov, who states that the terms ‘mortuary’ and ‘funerary’ should not be used to refer to rituals carried out at the tomb, suggesting that the cult started before the tomb owner’s death, at the point when the tomb or its decoration was finished. He refers to the cult as that of the ‘Double’ or of ‘representations’, based on his unique interpretation of the nature of the *kʿ* and its relation to the deceased (1997: 209).

³³ On the subject of biological and ontological changes at death, see Robb 2013.

³⁴ The definition of the term ‘ritual’ is disputed within archaeology. The sheer range of interpretations is exemplified in Kyriakidis’ edited volume (2007); I follow his own proposal that “ritual is an etic category that refers to set activities with a special (not-normal) intention-in-action, and which are specific to a group of people” (ibid. 294).

³⁵ See Harrington 2013: 7-10.

Thus the tomb space incorporates multiple temporal aspects as well as states of being. Nyord describes this succinctly: “the Egyptian tomb serves... as a kind of lens capturing and diffracting the past, present and future. The past life of the tomb owner is fused in monumental shape with depictions serving as a matrix for the recurrent [mortuary] cult taking place there, while the tomb owner in turn makes promises for the future wellbeing of those serving in the cult” (ibid. 195).

The tomb not only affords change (transformation), but also continuity (remembrance). In order that the deceased could make the transition to the afterlife, ritual actions were carried out before and during burial, but they were equally important afterwards, in that they allowed the living relatives to perpetuate the memory of the dead (Hartwig 2004: 40-43; Zinn 2017: 209-211). As Stevenson suggests, the study of mortuary rituals can be used to elucidate the nature of relationships between individuals and communities, and their cosmologies (2009b; 2013: 13-18).

This notion of perpetuation also applies to the social status of the deceased, their relationships to others, and their existence after death. Beyond its fundamental role as a repository for the body and a physical location for ritual activities, the tomb provides space to accommodate objects relating to the deceased and their mortuary cult, and a canvas for imagery and texts. All of these aspects play into a ‘matrix’ that affords the transformation and/or sustenance of the dead’s existence and social identity, within both the realm of the dead and the world of the living.

The accomplishment of change and continuity also hinges upon the notion of reciprocity: this involves the living participants in the cult, the king’s permission for access to resources for the burial and cult, and the gods who may honour the dead and grant offerings. The sustenance of the dead is reliant on participation from the living during the lifespan of the mortuary cult, on regular and ad-hoc occasions. Offerings were to be given on particular festivals and at seasonal intervals (Bárta 2011: 254; Legros 2016: 140-41), but ideally on every day according to offering formulae inscribed in tombs. The frequency and regularity with which offerings were given highlights another way in which offerings, time, and different states of existence are linked within a tomb setting.

A future time or outcome is implicit not only for the deceased, whose ongoing sustenance was at stake, but also for the living visitors, who could benefit or suffer as a result of their actions at the tomb – the dead were thought to be able to intervene positively or negatively in the world of the living (Baines 1991: 147). Reciprocity is therefore a notable theme in the

‘appeal to the living’ and ‘warning to visitors’ tomb inscriptions: the tomb owner pledges to give support from the world of the dead to those who make offerings and conduct themselves appropriately in the tomb; whereas those who behave inappropriately or harm the tomb will receive punishment either indirectly or directly from the deceased³⁶ (Baines and Lacovara 2002: 21-25).

Further, biographical inscriptions of the tomb owner often imply reciprocity, as these texts often describe the benefits that he has gleaned via his service to the state – namely that the king has granted permission for the tomb owner to have a burial site, and to receive a share of offerings redistributed from royal funerary cults, or of revenues from particular estates or towns (Muhs 2016: 30)³⁷. Priests employed to perform private mortuary cults could gain a share of these offerings as payment, and in the expectation that they would receive backing from the deceased in obtaining a burial and mortuary cult of their own, again emphasising reciprocity.

The deceased’s family members were linked to the mortuary cult by reciprocity, with children (the eldest son in particular) playing a role in venerating their parents and performing certain cult duties alongside, or instead of, paid priests (Bárta 2011: 254-57; Davies 2018: 66; Legros 2016: 208, 143-49; Harrington 2013: 29). The deceased’s family and dependents were also connected to the cult via its resources. The deceased, assuming they had the resources to do so, would likely set up a funerary estate (*pr dt*), the revenues from which would provision the mortuary cult and the payment of priests (Bárta 2011: 254; Davies 2018: 64)³⁸.

The rules governing the use and dissemination of the estate’s resources, as related to the descendants and dependents of the tomb owner, are evident in testament and transfer documents, as well as tomb inscriptions (Bárta 2011: 254-57; Muhs 2016: 34-37, 44-45). In return for proper use of the resources and for giving offerings to their ancestors, family members might hope for assistance from the world of the dead in life matters (Moreno García 2016: 2). Once the descendants themselves had passed away, ancestral lines could even be reflected in the positioning and layout of their tombs: tombs of officials linked by family ties may be found clustered together, and additional burial shafts and chambers may be created for family members in an individual’s tomb (*ibid.* 3; see also 2016; Kokina 2017).

³⁶ Yet the modification, re-use, and/or usurpation of tombs in order to provide for other deceased people (related or unrelated to the original occupant) were common practices (Harrington 2013: 133-37).

³⁷ See Muhs 2016 for an outline of economic aspects of Old Kingdom funerary estates and mortuary cults (44-45 for private funerary establishments).

³⁸ For the organisation of the priests and resources involved in the mortuary cult, see Bárta (2011: 256-57, citing work by Karl-Joachim Seyfried) and Legros (2016: 136-41).

Cult participants, being priests or family, would present offerings of food, drink, and other items to the deceased. The food and drink offerings, on which this study focuses, were not always perishable, since models, miniatures, and ‘false’ food and drink items are attested. Further, offerings could occur in other modes, such as images on the tomb walls or written lists, which could also be spoken aloud. Further, whether offerings were presented as perishable items or through speech, they were preferably accompanied by gestures and/or particular actions as part of ritual practices.

It seems that there was variation in the duration of mortuary cults, but Egyptologists generally maintain that most did not last beyond a few generations and were discontinued within 100 years, with only rare examples receiving long-term attention (Baines 1991: 147; Baines and Lacovara 2002: 15-16; Froot 2010: 488-89, Moreno García 2016: 5; Roeten 2014: 335, footnote 7; Shirai 2006: 333). Further, it has been suggested that there was a decrease in reliance on the “everlastingness” of the tomb and cult during the Old Kingdom due to socio-political instability, economic decline, and environmental changes (Roeten 2011: 178; 2014: 335, footnote 8).

Scholars have proposed that, in light of the instable nature of cult performance, the so-called ‘magical’ offerings (texts, images, and objects inside the tomb) could be relied upon to sustain the dead (Baines and Lacovara 2002: 11-12, citing Barta 1968; Groenewegen-Frankfort 1987: 29-32). Within the field of Egyptology, the study of mortuary religion and practices has not, until relatively recently, incorporated theoretical approaches that explicitly address questions of agency and ontology³⁹. The topic of mortuary religion includes ‘magical’ items and offerings, supposedly intended for the deceased’s use in the afterlife. As Nyord (2018) points out, we must be careful neither to assume (as has traditionally been the case) that all items found in burials are ones intended for the deceased to use in a ‘personal’ and eternal afterlife, nor to equate burial goods with beliefs without a careful examination of the evidence. Nyord suggests that fruitful results might be obtained by “embedding mortuary religion within the ontological, social and ritual lifeworld of the Ancient Egyptians” (ibid. 80). I hope that my study will contribute towards this shift in approach.

2.ii. Data selection

I will be conducting a close reading of illustrative examples of texts and images that comprise tombs’ decorative programmes, installations that acted as offering points, and

³⁹ See Nyord 2018 for an overview of historical approaches to mortuary religion within Egyptology, as well as proposals concerning how to address the topic using anthropological approaches.

offering-related objects found in the superstructure⁴⁰. Therefore, I have selected a range of tombs that, between them, feature well-preserved examples of internal and external decoration, offering installations (offering tables, benches, false doors, basins, statuary, and animal tethering points), and finds that have recorded archaeological contexts. Based on these criteria, I chose thirteen tombs (**Table 2.1** on p. 32-33, **Maps 2.1a-b**) from among those at Saqqara (see **Map 0.1** for location of Saqqara in Egypt) as a ‘core’ set for my investigation. These Old Kingdom period tombs together exhibit the above-described features and most have been published, or re-published, relatively recently.

The number of tombs was determined with the limitations of this study in mind, as well as the mode of study: the number is large enough to encompass examples of all the features under examination, but small enough to allow detailed study of these individual features, as well as how they relate to one another (where attested) in each given tomb. As Vischak notes, each tomb can be considered as a whole and yet also as the combination of its constituent parts (2003: 133-34). While each tomb has its individualities, which vary with time, location, chapel type, and personal choice, there is a level of commonality in the layout, architectonic features, and decoration among tombs during the late Old Kingdom (see Harpur 1987: 59, 123). This study focuses on illustrative examples from late Old Kingdom elite tombs at Saqqara, but my examination of the way in which the cult operates, and of the relationship between the living and the dead as it is played out in the tomb via the use of offerings and offering-related features, is more widely applicable to tombs of a comparable date from other areas in Egypt. For this reason, supplementary material from contemporary mortuary sites is occasionally referred to where relevant in the discussion, to provide additional examples for comparison.

As the Saqqara necropolis is open to the public, I was able to see first-hand the layout of the tombs at the site, as well as the interior of some of the core tombs⁴¹, although a number are closed to visitors due to conservation concerns. The website www.osirisnet.net documents many of the tombs among my selection through detailed room-by-room descriptions, photographs, and line drawings. This is a particularly useful extra source of information for the tombs that are now closed to the public, as the website creator (Thierry Benderitter) was able to gain special access to certain tombs.

⁴⁰ Features in the burial chamber are discussed only in as far as they relate to the actions of the ongoing mortuary cult.

⁴¹ The tombs of Akhethotep and Phtahhotep, Mereruka, Nikauisesi, Ty, and Ihy/Idut. I also visited other tombs of comparable date open to the public, namely those of Iynefert, Kagemni, and the prince Wenis-anekh.

Another reason for my selecting tombs from Saqqara is the time period to which they belong. Multiple sites across the Memphite area⁴² – and throughout Egypt – were used for private tombs during the later Old Kingdom. The 5th Dynasty saw the rise of high powered officials from non-royal backgrounds, and at Saqqara they began to be buried in the ‘royal sector’, in the vicinity of the pyramids, for the first time (Roth 1993: 48 and fig. 7b). Saqqara was the preferred burial site for many 5th and 6th Dynasty kings and so it became the location used for contemporary tombs of high-ranking officials who attained the privilege of a being buried near to their rulers.

The preceding 4th Dynasty had witnessed several changes relevant to tomb design and the mortuary cult. These include: the consistent use of the potter’s wheel; the introduction of ‘Meidum ware’ ceramics frequently used to contain and/or present offerings; the inclusion of miniature and model vessels among burial goods; and developments in offering chapel decoration, such as formulaic offering texts and ‘daily life’ scenes (Bárta 2011: 132). Importantly, the mortuary cult for non-royal as well as royal individuals had developed, with the dead now relying on the actions of the living for their continued existence (Roth 1993: 52)⁴³. I selected tombs from the 5th and 6th Dynasties as these changes were well incorporated by this time.

It should be noted that further relevant developments occurred in the 5th Dynasty. These include the Pyramid Texts, which are first attested in royal pyramids at this time, and the introduction of the god Osiris into royal and (subsequently) non-royal funerary religion (Bárta 2011: 156). Old Kingdom non-royal tomb architecture had also begun to incorporate some elements common to royal burials, such as pillared porticos and open courtyards, while decoration was appearing not only in the offering chapel, but also in other rooms of the tomb (ibid. 176-79). The increase in size and elaboration in non-royal tombs during this time, together with the concomitant increase in decorative elements, provides ample examples of the features examined in my study.

Table 2.1: Summary of ‘core’ tombs at Saqqara selected for analysis

Tomb owner(s)	Period of construction	Key excavation reports
<i>Akhethotep and his son, Ptahhotep II</i>	V.L (Harpur 1987: 272)	Paget and Pirie 1896; Davies 1900; Davies 1901; Hassan 1975

⁴² The Memphite necropoleis include Memphis, Giza, Dashur, Abusir, and Meidum, in addition to Saqqara.

⁴³ The 4th Dynasty elite tombs at Giza took a unique form: a superstructure without internal access, but with slab stelae placed in the façade identifying the owner and forming the focal point for cult activity (Bárta 2011: 143).

(Dual tomb with separate offering chambers)		
<i>Ankhhmahor</i>	VI.E (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 18)	Firth and Gunn 1926; Badawy 1978; Kanawati and Hassan 1997
<i>Ihy/Idut</i> (Ihy's tomb was re-used by Idut, a princess)	V.L for Ihy; VI.E for Idut (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003: 36-37)	Macramallah 1935; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003
<i>Irukhaptah</i>	V.L (McFarlane 2000: 16-19)	De Rachewiltz 1960; McFarlane 2000
<i>Kaiemheset</i>	V.M-V.L (McFarlane 2003:19-23)	Firth and Gunn 1926; Quibell and Hayter 1927; McFarlane 2003
<i>Kaiemsenu</i>	V.M-V.L (McFarlane 2003: 70-72)	Firth and Gunn 1926; McFarlane 2003
<i>Merefnebef</i>	VI.E-VI.L ⁴⁴ (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 246-50)	Myśliwiec et al. 2004
<i>Mereruka</i> (Large complex with separate area for his wife, son, and mother; due to its size, only Mereruka's part is included in this study)	VI.E (Kanawati et al. 2010: 32-33)	Daressy 1898; Duell 1938; Firth and Gunn 1926; Kanawati et al. 2010; Kanawati et al. 2011
<i>Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep</i> (Dual tomb dedicated equally to two individuals)	V.M-V.L (Harpur 1987: 274)	Moussa and Altenmüller 1977
<i>Nikauisesi</i>	VI.E (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000:17-23)	Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000
<i>Nyankhnefertem</i>	VI.E (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 280-81)	Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010
<i>Seankhuiptah</i>	VI.E (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: 40-41)	Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998
<i>Ty</i>	V.L (Harpur 1987: 277)	Steindorff 1913; Wild 1953, 1966; Épron and Daumas 1939

⁴⁴ The east chapel was added in the late 6th Dynasty, but the earliest phase of the west chapel likely dates to the reign of Teti or Userkare (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 246-50).

Types of material forming illustrative examples

The material from the tombs examined falls into four broad categories: texts; images; ceramics and other objects; and installations. However, these are not addressed in individual chapters in my study – I present them here in categories to provide the reader with an overview, but I stress that there is a degree of overlap between groups (e.g. a false door installation might feature both text and images on its surface; a statue can be considered an installation and an image). The categories are not intended as typologies.

This study is not exhaustive and it would be beyond its scope to include a detailed analysis of all of the instances of offering-related texts, images, and objects from the core tombs. Rather, in order to explore particular aspects of the mortuary cult, theoretical approaches are applied to illustrative examples of the material.

Previous studies have been conducted into certain features of Old Kingdom tombs, such as offering tables, false doors, and serdabs, and on their decorative programmes (see **Chapter 1**). These studies generally treat the objects, features, or imagery in isolation and by type or chronology, whereas I posit that the constituents of the abovementioned categories are part of a holistic scheme of offering activity that sustains the deceased and acts as an interface between them and the living. These studies form a solid basis on which to build, and my study need not duplicate their work.

1. Texts

The key texts that will be examined in the tombs are those on the façades – especially ‘addresses to the living’ – and those on or accompanying offering installations (false doors, tables and slabs, and statuary). Inscriptions relating to offering types and modes, as well as presentation methods are of primary interest, as are captions that provide information on the figures depicted as participating in the mortuary cult, including their identity, relevant social roles (particularly that of priest), and any cult-related actions that they are carrying out.

2. Images

The reliefs and painted imagery in the tombs are well enough preserved in many cases to enable a close study of their content, yet the decoration on the tomb façades is generally in a poorer state of preservation. Scenes that appear to be clearly related to the preparation and presentation of food and drink offerings, as well as those occurring in conjunction with offering points, will be the focus of the investigation – whether in the outer or inner areas of the tombs.

The types of statuary examined comprise engaged forms integrated into walls, seated and standing statues appearing alongside offering-related features such as tables and basins, and those found in serdabs.

3. Ceramics and other objects

Ceramics data and analysis is drawn primarily from the excavation reports of the core tombs, as well as publications by Rzeuska, who has worked extensively on the pottery finds from Saqqara (notably West Saqqara), including their use in ritual activities related in particular to the funeral (2001; 2006). While there are numerous remnants of ceramic forms attested at Saqqara, there are few finds attested *in situ*, making a discussion of the use of offering-related ceramics in the ongoing mortuary cult difficult. My study focuses on the instances in which ceramics have been found *in situ* inside the tomb complexes. A summary of offering-related ceramics and vessels of other materials is located in the Appendix (**Table A2**, pp. 271-73).

The tombs do feature a small number of offering-related model and miniature objects composed of ceramic and other materials, but (as explained above in **Section 1.iv**) these are not examined in detail in this study save for the few *in situ* examples discovered in tomb superstructures.

4. Offering installations

Offering-related features built or integrated into the tomb (installations)⁴⁵ to be examined comprise those in the inner and outer areas of the tombs, and include: false doors; offering tables and slabs; benches associated with offering tables; basins; so-called animal tethering points; and also statuary (mentioned above). These may appear in close connection with one another. Where traces of activity that could be related to the mortuary cult are found in these areas, including wear on offering surfaces, evidence of burning, and repeated modification or repair of an installation, these will also be discussed.

2.iii. Methodology and method

The mortuary cult is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, as my introductory section indicates. In order to shed light on the nature and workings of the various offering modes, I am using a multi-pronged theoretical approach to attack the problem from different angles. Illustrative examples of the material from my chosen tombs will be presented within a

⁴⁵ Some of these features could, in theory, be removed from the tomb, as they are not rock-hewn or built directly into the walls. However, I count them as installations because they were intended as permanent features and would not be easily portable due to their size and weight.

number of case studies, in which particular strands of theory will be used to shed light on the agency and affordances of the offering modes, and the ways in which participation by the living were integral for the functioning of the cult.

Adopting a ‘thought experiments’ approach

My approach can be characterised as one of ‘thought experiments’ (Alberti and Bray 2009; Holbraad 2009). This approach arises from ideas presented in a special section of an issue of *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* (CAJ) dedicated to subjects, objects, and alternative ontologies (2009, vol. 19:3). Alberti and Bray, in their introduction to that issue, focus especially on how to approach the phenomenon of ‘animism’ in different societies, including the agency of objects. I view their notion of ‘thought experiments’ as a valuable way of approaching the ‘magical’ agency of mortuary offerings in multiple modes: it permits the investigation of material that challenges assumptions based in Western scholarship concerning the nature of ‘things’, such as perceived inherent differences between the material and immaterial, or people and objects⁴⁶.

The ‘thought experiments’ approach is also supported by Holbraad in his afterword to the same CAJ issue. Holbraad emphasises the importance of pursuing *conceptualisations* (rather than interpretations or explanations) of phenomena. Conceptualisations are highly relevant to the part of my study that examines the emic perception of the force of magic and its relation to offerings, as well as to a future strand of research that I propose, which would centre on the relative ontologies of the body, offerings, and magic in Ancient Egypt.

As Alberti and Bray note, the contributors to the special issue of CAJ were “concerned to explore the implications of coming face to face with unexpected things and meanings, necessitating adjustments to methodologies in order to be open to such encounters” (2009: 340). Indeed, Holbraad raises the issue of contradictions that might become apparent in the course of analysing a particular phenomenon, stating that we need to find alternative concepts that do not produce them should this happen (2009: 433-34)⁴⁷. I discuss aspects of the offering cult that might appear ‘unexpected’ or ‘contradictory’. For example, priests offered food to the deceased, but then consumed it themselves as payment for their services. This implies that the Egyptians knew that the dead would not actually ‘eat’ it, yet tomb inscriptions and images still portray perishable offerings as a vital form of sustenance for the

⁴⁶ Aside from ‘animism’ and Gell’s notion of ‘abducted’ agency (1998), both considered in my study, there are other prominent theoretical approaches that explore relative agency and the relationships between humans and non-humans – notably Actor Network Theory (see Latour 2005) and ‘entanglement’ (Hodder 2012).

⁴⁷ It is unclear whether Holbraad means contradictions that appear to an ‘outsider’, rather than to a member of the society in question.

deceased. Secondly, both perishable and imperishable forms of offerings were perceived to ‘feed’ the dead in Ancient Egypt – an ability that may seem illogical and perhaps attributable to beliefs in ‘magic’ – but often only imperishable forms such as images, texts, and objects are described as ‘magical’ in academic literature⁴⁸.

The thought experiments regarding the operation of the private mortuary cult, focusing on the agency of modes versus that of people, are presented through a number of case studies. Each case study applies theoretical approaches to illustrative examples of material from the core tombs. I must emphasise that creating an all-encompassing framework for illustrating the workings of Egyptian mortuary offerings (for example, including economic, legal, or logistical factors of providing offerings) lies beyond the scope of the thesis. Indeed, such a framework would run the risk of being reductive or restrictive. Instead, I form ‘building blocks’ comprising complementary theoretical approaches that will hopefully provide a basis for future research into the complexities of the cult.

My case studies, in addition to being ‘thought experiments’, are influenced by a conceptual framework that Nyord has developed for the study of the ritual use of images in Ancient Egypt. Nyord follows an ontological approach as promoted in the 2007 edited volume *Thinking Through Things*, whereby ‘things’ can “dictate the terms of their own analysis” (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007: 4-7; Nyord 2017: 337-38). He examines the relations that an object might suggest via its context and the interplay of text, image, and practice associated with it. While focusing predominantly on anthropomorphic imagery, Nyord emphasises the referential nature of images in Ancient Egypt, i.e. that they can point to something other than themselves via ‘ontological ligatures’ (2017: 338-39).

As Nyord’s work highlights, examining relationships between not only images and what they depict, but also relations between images, texts, objects, and practice, leads to a more in-depth consideration of these phenomena – beyond mimetic explanations – and towards how they were perceived to operate and ‘be’ in Ancient Egypt⁴⁹. I employ Nyord’s concept of ‘presentification’ (see **Chapter 3**) particularly to elucidate how the deceased is made manifest in the tomb for the purposes of interaction with the living.

Introduction to the theoretically informed case studies

The individual strands of theory are described during the course of each case study. The case studies focus on different areas of the superstructures of the tombs, although burial chambers

⁴⁸ But cf. Roeten, who states that that offerings of food placed in front of the false door were also received by the deceased’s *ka* via “magic” (2014: 337).

⁴⁹ This approach can be described as a relational ontological one; for this term see Alberti 2013.

are only mentioned inasmuch as they may relate to activity by the living above ground, and to the interaction between the living and dead. A brief introduction to the case studies is provided here, which also serves to outline the core chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 3

Although not a case study proper, this chapter introduces the notions of ‘presentification’ and ‘reciprocal sight’, which are discussed in subsequent chapters and are of relevance to the overall study. The first denotes the way in which the deceased is made manifest within the tomb via imagery, with the two sharing an ontological connection; the second describes the mutual gaze enacted between the living and the deceased, who is manifest through imagery in the tomb. Presentification and reciprocal sight enable the living and dead to interact, which is vital in order that offerings can be presented and received.

Chapter 4

The discussion begins with the tomb façade – the first area that a visitor would see. In this case study, I examine the ways in which the texts and images on the outside of the tomb might encourage visitors to participate in the cult, also considering the potential varying literacy levels of the visitors.

It looks at particular functions of imagery: signalling the tomb owner’s status and identity; inviting visitors into the tomb; and presentifying the deceased in this area. It also explores the offering-related themes emerging in texts: the reciprocal relationship between the living and dead that involves offerings, the positive and negative consequences of the living’s actions at the tomb, and the types of offering actions that are desired of them. These texts constitute an important written source of information regarding the social impetus behind offerings presentation (i.e. questions of why) and the ways in which they were to be provided to the dead by the living (i.e. how).

While this case study incorporates more ‘traditional’ approaches, i.e. the examination of textual sources and the close reading of images on the tomb façade, it also incorporates the notion of presentification outlined above.

Chapter 5

In order to further explore the importance of participation of the living in the mortuary cult, I examine the physical affordances, i.e. the action possibilities, of tomb features and installations. The term ‘affordance’ derives from phenomenology and was coined by

psychologist James Gibson (1979) to denote what is offered to organisms by the environment – specific actions and activities are made possible by properties of objects.

The information sought from the offering installations (described in **Section 2.i**) comprises: dimensions; notable signs of wear/use; combinations of features; and practical considerations, including their positioning within the tomb complexes and how they might have been used. Also linked to phenomenology, and included in this chapter, is the notion of ‘reciprocal sight’, which is examined when considering depictions and statues of the tomb owner in relation to the ‘audience’ of tomb visitors, extending the discussion of physical affordances to conceptual ones.

This case study further highlights that tombs were carefully designed with active ritual use in mind and, as such, the intention was not for the deceased to rely upon ‘magical’ offerings without input from the living. Although it focuses on the physical use of the tomb space, the physical affordances are situated within their particular social and communicative setting in the other chapters.

Chapter 6

Should visitors be persuaded and prompted by the façade to venture inside the tomb, they would be able to view the internal decoration. This case study analyses the careful deployment of offering-related images to ‘guide’ the movement and actions of the living in the tomb as regards offering cult participation.

The first half of the chapter concerns movement guiding. It maps the location and orientation of offering bearer and cult participant figures on the internal walls of a selection of tombs to ascertain whether and how they act as visual ‘guides’ for visitors navigating their way through the tomb to the offering point(s). The significance of the living’s movement in the space is then socially and ritually contextualised.

The second half of the chapter examines examples of the offering-bearer and cult participant figures for the types of actions that they are depicted as taking in relation to offerings, as these might have been deployed to prompt visitors to act likewise – particularly through repetition and proximity to offering locations. Other motifs commonly repeated in offering areas are also included in the discussion, such as images of food and drink, and of the tomb owner seated before an offering table, as these ‘reinforce’ the intended use of the space, as well as the presence of the tomb owner.

Finally, the identity and roles of the intended audience of the tomb imagery are considered. The requirement of active viewers is explored through examples of scenes for which a counterpart – a living, participating audience – seems to be required in order for them to be ‘completed’. This underscores the importance of a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead.

Chapter 7

The preceding case studies illustrate that in order to understand the operation of the mortuary cult and the importance of the living in the sustenance of the deceased, it is crucial to investigate the communicative modes used to impart messages to tomb visitors who might participate in the cult and provide offerings, as well as the modes through which offerings are given to the dead.

This case applies a multimodal social semiotic approach – based on that developed by Kress (2010) and Van Leeuwen (2005) to understand communication and meaning-making in all of its forms – in order to consider some ways in which messages concerning the mortuary cult were imparted to the living in the tomb environment. One aspect of a multimodal social-semiotic approach is modal affordance: the concept of affordance applies not just to the physical possibilities and constraints of objects (discussed above), but also to the possibilities and constraints of all modes of communication.

To analyse examples of how texts and images can be composed and arranged in a manner to highlight salient visual information about the mortuary cult to tomb visitors, I look at the semiotic notion of ‘framing’ and, drawing on Nyord’s study (2013b), explore a ‘conceptual metaphor’ particularly evident in tomb decoration.

I consider modes in two lights: the different modes used in the tomb to communicate information about the cult to the living, which enabled a wide pool of potential participants to be reached; and the various offering modes that could be used to nourish the deceased, which permitted people with differing literacy and resource levels to engage in the mortuary cult. As offerings made by the living emerge as preferable, the necessity of their involvement in sustaining the dead is highlighted.

Chapter 8

This case study probes the question of offering modes’ agency in relation to magic, and the role of the living in endowing them with the capacity to generate sustenance for the deceased. I draw particularly upon Ritner’s work on the mechanics of Egyptian magic

(1993), and Nyord's studies that consider the workings of Egyptian funerary magic (2014; 2017; 2018). Regarding the concept of agency, I consider Gell's notion of 'abducted' agency (1998).

Alongside these theoretical strands, a 'traditional' approach is taken in this case study, namely that of examining a range of textual sources from inside and beyond the core tombs in order to better understand the emic conceptualisation of magic in Ancient Egypt. This includes how it related to creating and manifesting things through image, text, speech, and gesture, as well as how, when, and by whom it might have been channelled in the tomb in order to 'activate' the offerings' capacity to sustain the dead.

I suggest that the source of 'magic' underlying the effectiveness of certain offering modes is ultimately abducted (mediated) divine agency, channelled by the living through particular ritual actions. The discussion reveals interrelationships of divine, royal, and elite 'actors' in the offering cult – the hierarchies involved in prompting and permitting the 'magical' agency of mortuary offerings is again linked to the notion of social reciprocity.

If the cult ceased, and the maintenance of the tomb ceased, the question remains whether the imperishable offerings inside would continue to sustain the dead, given they were 'activated' by the living previously. I discuss archaeological evidence of continued ritual actions carried out at offering points in the tomb, positing that this indicates the 'maintenance' of the tomb environment, which I suggest was needed to ensure the continued effectiveness of offerings presented there.

Map removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Scott Williams.

Map 2.1a: Location of tombs forming data selection (outlined in red, outlines not to scale). Other notable Old Kingdom tombs and pyramids also shown.
Source: Adapted from GIS map created by Scott Williams (see 2018).

Map removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Scott Williams.

Map 2.1b: Location of tombs forming data selection (cont.) (outlined in red, outlines not to scale). Other notable Old Kingdom tombs and pyramids also shown.
Source: Adapted from GIS map created by Scott Williams (see 2018).

Chapter 3: Manifesting the presence of the deceased in the tomb

Following on from the introduction to the mortuary cult (**Section 2.i**), this chapter introduces two key notions involved, and elaborated upon, in the subsequent part of the study: presentification and reciprocal sight. Both of these are crucial in manifesting the presence of the deceased in the tomb space, and for creating a connection between them and the living.

3.i Key roles of imagery of the deceased in the tomb

Renfrew has posited a framework of inference to aid archaeologists in recognising ritual or cult practice within a space (1985; 1994). The performance of the mortuary cult in Ancient Egypt can be considered as ritual practice according to Renfrew's four principle criteria: the space in which the rituals take place (i.e. the tomb) exhibits attention-focusing devices; the location acts as a boundary zone between this world and the next; the 'deity' or 'transcendent force' is made present there; and the cult involves participation from the living, including offerings (Renfrew 1994: 51-52, citing Renfrew and Bahn 1991: 359-60).

While Renfrew refers to a 'deity' or 'transcendent force', we can instead consider the presence of the deceased. This is vital in the tomb if ritual activity centred on the dead is to take place there, as it provides a focus for that action. Further, the repetition of images of the tomb owner is noticeable on the outside and the inside of the tombs. Renfrew refers to such repetition as 'redundancy', which describes the repetition of symbols that might be found in the decoration of a space used for ritual and is among the indicators related to the "focusing of attention" there (Renfrew 1985: 14, 16, 19; 1994: 51). I explore this topic in **Chapter 5**.

Renfrew concentrates on the object of ritual practice (the deity, transcendent force, or, in this case, the deceased) being 'symbolised' in material form. However, as will be seen in **Sections 3.ii-iii**, images of the tomb owner in Egypt go further than abstract or mimetic representation – they manifest the presence of what they depict.

Regarding Ancient Egyptian tombs specifically, Hartwig proposes that imagery of the deceased in the tomb functions in two principal ways, which she terms 'magical' and 'commemorative' (2004). Although her study concerns New Kingdom period tombs, many of her propositions about images of the dead are also relevant to the discussion of those from other periods.

In relation to 'commemorative' functions, Hartwig suggests that images of the tomb owner allowed them to present their identity and status to the world of the living and to perpetuate these aspects of themselves within the community through 'monumental discourse' (ibid.

40-43, 52). Concerning ‘magical’ functions, she suggests that 2D and 3D images of the deceased allowed the tomb owner to exist in the ‘next world’ by projecting themselves into it through imagery, and to take a form through which they could receive offerings; and that offerings themselves could also be manifested through 2D and 3D depictions, acting as “magical reinforcements” to provision the dead (ibid. 38). Hartwig follows Bolshakov’s suggestion that images could manifest ‘doubles’ of what they depicted for the benefit of the *ka* aspect of a deceased person (their own ‘double’), and Ritner’s observations regarding links between the *ka* and magic (Egyptian *ḥkꜣ*) (ibid. 37-38; Bolshakov 1997: 210-13, 264-66; Ritner 1993: 247-49). I discuss the concept and operation of magic in relation to offerings in detail in **Chapter 8**.

Hartwig acknowledges the importance of ritual actions in the magical activation of images and texts in the tomb through ceremonies such as the ‘opening of the mouth’⁵⁰, and proposes that images and texts could, subsequent to such rituals, manifest “limitless number of goods within the creative environment of the tomb” should the living stop performing actions there (2004: 38-39). However, while this view highlights the actions of the living in the initial activation of offerings, it fails to recognise the ongoing importance of their input in maintaining the effectiveness of the tomb environment in which the ‘magical’ offerings might operate.

Although Hartwig presents magical and commemorative functions as distinct in her study, I propose that they can be understood as very much intertwined. The interaction of the living with the dead through offering-related actions incorporated magical activation and maintenance, and articulated social relationships between the two parties, thus linking ‘magical’ and ‘commemorative’ aspects.

3.ii Making the deceased present through imagery

Presentification

Presentification is a term employed by Nyord to denote the capacity for representations to manifest their point of reference, predicated on the two sharing ontological links. Presentification is one of a “triad of idealised possibilities” (presentification, alteration, and substitution) that Nyord uses in his examinations of Middle Kingdom funerary images and objects to explore the ontological communion between images and what they depict (2016;

⁵⁰ This ritual rendered the faculties of anthropomorphic images, as well as the mummified body, functionally effective and able to receive offerings (Eaton-Krauss 1984: 75-76; Roth 1992: 113, 146-47 and 2001: 605-607). Models of items implements used in the ceremony are attested in Old Kingdom burial goods, while offerings related to it are mentioned in Old Kingdom offering lists (Roth 1992: 114-16, 122-23). Hartwig does not specify whether and how such rituals might have activated non-anthropomorphic images.

2017: 338-41). Nyord adopts the concept of presentification from J.-P. Vernant (1991: 151-63) and I follow Nyord's employment of it. The notion of presentification is connected with mimesis; in their iconographic capacity, images and hieroglyphic texts relate to what they represent in Ancient Egypt.

Ontological links enable the representation (or, more correctly, the presentification) to be affected in some way. Risser unpicks Gadamer's understanding of the concept of Truth (as expounded in *Truth and Method*) and notes that for Gadamer, a representation has the power to effect the original, i.e. what is depicted) (Risser 1996: 164-65). As Gadamer writes, "...a picture is not a copy of a copied being, but is in ontological communion with what is copied" (1975: 126). Nyord provides convincing examples that demonstrate that Egyptian material culture has this power in particular scenarios, examining these in accordance with his triad of idealised possibilities (2017).

Presentification is a crucial concept throughout my study. Following its premise, the tomb owner, through a representation that is in ontological communion with their being, can be the recipient of offering-related actions and be directly affected by them. Further, offering-related items, practices, and participants are part of the relational network that includes the deceased. Although the tomb owner exists in a different form from the living – one which is ontologically altered as a result of post-mortem biological and ritual events – they can take part in the world of the living in a limited way.

I suggest that presentification might also occur through the name and titles of the deceased, for two reasons: firstly, the name is an inextricable aspect of a person in Ancient Egypt; and secondly, texts can be treated similarly to images due to the pictorial nature of hieroglyphs and as both text and images are considered 'potent'. This is further discussed in **Section 4.i** (the name) and **Section 8.i** (the potency of images and texts).

3.iii Creating a visual connection between the living and dead

Reciprocal sight

Linked to presentification is the notion of 'reciprocal sight'. This denotes a two-way visual relationship between the living and the dead, which has been examined by Nyord in relation to the manifestation of the deceased (2009: 454-57; 2014: 32-33). Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's concept of chiasmic vision, Nyord highlights that rather than the deceased gazing out at the external world with no reciprocation, the living gaze back interactively and, as such, "the reciprocal gaze becomes a creative enactment of the relation between the living and the dead" (2014: 32).

Depictions of the tomb owner's eyes are not simply a representation, or a means through which the deceased can 'look out' at the offerings in the tomb, but they contribute to his/her presentification and manifestation in the tomb space; they can realise the presence of the deceased, just as speech acts, writing, and decoration can effect a state of affairs, according to Egyptian perception, rather than communicating something already existing (ibid.) Nyord notes that an act of seeing is not reducible to 'subject' and 'object' due to chiasmic interplay (ibid). Although I refer in this study to the 'audience' of the images, texts, and objects in the tomb, it must be emphasised that interactions between imagery of the tomb owner and the living involve an element of reciprocity.

Therefore, images of the tomb owner play an active part in facilitating interactions between the living and the dead by manifesting the presence of the latter. The notion of reciprocal sight is relevant to all types of imagery in the tomb, including 2D and 3D images, and those executed in relief. However, it is particularly significant for images that allow a *face-on* gaze to be shared between the statue and the viewer. Although there are examples of 2D images and reliefs that depict both eyes at once within the repertoire of Ancient Egyptian visual culture⁵¹, this is uncommon outside of specific circumstances⁵². I connect the direct gaze to the physical and modal affordances of engaged or in-the-round statuary.

The issue of partial sight must also be mentioned in relation to reciprocal sight, as not all images of the deceased can be directly or fully viewed by visitors to the tomb. In reference to this, Nyord raises the subject of *serdabs*, sealed rooms that contained statues of the tomb owner and sometimes of family members and dependents – often the *serdab* incorporated a small slit through which visitors might gain a partial view of statuary of the deceased (2013a: 198-200). This is one of the aspects of the tomb's design that created a simultaneous impression of 'presence' and of 'absence' of the deceased in the tomb; others being the imagery of the tomb owner on the walls of the tomb, the presence of the deceased's body in the burial chamber (which was not to be accessed after the funeral), and the false door (see ibid.) All of these features are discussed later in this study with reference to the actions of the offering cult.

⁵¹ For example, the female figures in the banquet scene from the 18th Dynasty chapel of Nebamun, held in the British Museum (see Robins 1997: 139, figure 159).

⁵² Such as the depiction of the god Bes, or pairs of *wadjet* eyes (for example as found on Middle Kingdom coffins).

3.iv Summary

Images of the tomb owner go beyond symbolic or mimetic representations, instead manifesting the presence of the deceased in the tomb space. This is made possible via ontological ligatures between a depiction and what it depicts. Such a manifestation allows for interaction between the living and the dead. The notion of reciprocal sight underscores that the action of viewing images carried out by the living in the tomb is not one-sided; in the case of anthropomorphic imagery of the tomb owner, the deceased looks back. Such a shared gaze can be considered to engender a sense of connection between the two parties. Relating this back to Renfrew's indicators of ritual activity, reciprocal sight may be part of the 'focusing of attention' as well as the 'presence of the deity' (here, the deceased) in the tomb space.

However, it is important to reiterate that the initial activation of images and texts relating to the tomb owner ultimately required ritual input from the living, as did the maintenance of the tomb environment in which they appeared. This matter is discussed in depth in **Chapter 8**.

The next chapter probes the functions of imagery of the deceased on the tomb exterior, which scholars have suggested include 'signalling' and 'inviting'. I explore the connection of these two functions with the offering-related actions that the living are desired to carry out at the tomb. While I concur that exterior imagery has signalling and inviting functions, I propose that presentification is a more apt term to describe its role in communicating the identity of the tomb owner and in manifesting the deceased's presence for the purpose of offering-related rituals that could be enacted by visitors in the vicinity of the tomb façade.

Chapter 4. Eliciting and justifying cult participation through tomb façade decoration

A visitor to the necropolis need not venture far into a tomb complex before being confronted with images and texts. This chapter investigates the ways in which images of the tomb owner and texts on the outermost areas of tomb complexes implicitly or explicitly encourage passers-by to make offerings there and/or to proceed into the structure proper.

The decoration found on the façade and outer areas of a tomb outlines and elicits particular actions to be performed there. Particularly prominent is the genre of texts often called ‘appeals to the living’, which are addresses by the deceased tomb owner to those who are still alive. Their content urges passers-by to make offerings, justifies the tomb owner’s right to receive offerings, and outlines the positive and/or negative effects for the living if they behave in particular ways at the tomb. These texts are explored in the second part of the chapter, with a focus on what they communicate regarding the reciprocal relationship between the two parties in respect of offerings.

Prior to this, the first half of the chapter examines the images, names, and titles of the deceased found on the outermost areas of the tombs, and considers the roles that these might play in ‘inviting’ visitors into the tomb and ‘signalling’ its owner’s identity. These functions are significant in respect of the cult, as the principle offering points of a tomb are located inside the chapel proper, and as the deceased must be identified as the recipient of any offerings presented. In addition to a consideration of ‘inviting’ and ‘signalling’ functions, I propose using a third term, ‘presentifying’ (see Nyord 2017). The latter encompasses something that the other two terms do not: images and texts not only display the tomb owner’s identity, but *manifest* their presence, allowing the living to interact with them for the purpose of effecting offerings.

4.i. ‘Inviting’ and ‘signalling’ functions of façade decoration

Harpur’s comprehensive study of Old Kingdom tomb decoration (1987) provides an overview of the chronological and geographical variations in the elements of tomb façades and their decoration, including lintels, drums, door jambs, and thicknesses (ibid. 43-58). Therefore, my discussion need not entail a description of the façades of all of the selected core tombs at Saqqara, nor how decoration changes over time and location. As Harpur notes, there are not many examples of well-preserved, multiple features on façades among the large number of Old Kingdom tombs at Saqqara or Giza⁵³ (ibid. 43). However, among my core

⁵³ See Harpur 1987: 43, footnote 32 for a list of the Giza and Saqqara tombs that, at the time of the publication, had all of these features relatively intact.

tombs there are a few relatively intact examples that can be examined in respect of whether the decoration around their entrances is designed to prompt or ‘invite’ movements and actions from visitors.

I focus below on the images of the deceased, their name, and titles, as these are the most prominent features of the façade decoration; they relate the tomb to its owner and provide a point of interface between the living and the dead. The ensuing discussion does not claim to cover *all* possible functions of the decorative elements of tomb façades, but centres on those connected with the living’s participation in the offering cult.

The two functions examined below are proposed by Roeten in his study of the decoration of Old Kingdom tombs at Giza (2014). Through statistical analysis, he links chronological changes to the decoration of entrance thicknesses and jambs with changes to the decoration of false door jambs on the western wall of cult chapels and, ultimately, to changing attitudes about the sustenance of the deceased (ibid. 241-60).

Roeten proposes that decorated entrance jambs and thicknesses perform a ‘signalling’⁵⁴ function: the images and texts capture the attention of people passing by the tomb and communicate the identity of the tomb owner to them (2014: xvi, 242). He also suggests that the decoration on entrance thicknesses might have played an ‘inviting’ function; however, he does not define this function and its operation in detail⁵⁵, writing only that it “invites the visitor to enter into the corridor towards the chapel”, and he also states that, at Giza at least, it did not endure beyond the end of the 5th Dynasty⁵⁶ (ibid. 242, footnote 5, 258-60, 349-50). Below, I use examples from the Saqqara tombs to explore how Roeten’s notions of ‘signalling’ and ‘inviting’ are evidenced on the façades, and to consider whether these two terms adequately convey the roles of the images, names, and titles of the tomb owner that are prevalent there.

The ‘inviting’ function

The first elements that visitors see when approaching the tomb may be door thicknesses and jambs, especially where tombs are arranged in ‘streets’: the spatial arrangement of the tombs

⁵⁴ Roeten differentiates between a ‘person signalling’ and ‘purpose signalling’ function of decoration, predicated on his interpretation of which images show ‘non-cultic’ or ‘cultic’ themes, respectively (2014: 242, footnote 4).

⁵⁵ The ‘inviting’ function is not defined in the ‘technical terms and abbreviations’ section of Roeten 2014 (xiii-xvii) whereas the ‘signalling’ function is.

⁵⁶ Roeten concludes that the only function to remain during the last period of the 5th Dynasty and into the 6th Dynasty was a ‘person signalling’ one (2014: 258-60, 349-50).

is still visible today and, even though many of the façades have been restored in modern times, the original sight line along the doorways is evident at Saqqara (**Figure 4.1**).



Figure 4.1: One of the ‘streets’ of tombs in the Teti cemetery at Saqqara (Ankhmahor’s tomb located at the far end). Entrance thicknesses are visible as a visitor progresses down such a street.

Source: Author’s photograph.

Thicknesses and jambs usually include images of the tomb owner, together with their name and titles. Drums feature the tomb owner’s name and selected titles, and are usually readily visible, although some are deeply set back⁵⁷ (Harpur 1987: 48). In addition to names, titles, and at least one image of the tomb owner, lintels may feature an offering formula; however, the quantity and arrangement of text and imagery varies with time and place (ibid. 44-49).

⁵⁷ Some of the drums that are set far back are decorated in raised instead of sunken relief. Harpur views the use of raised versus sunken relief as a response to the different lighting conditions on the outside versus inside of tombs (Harpur 1987: 46, footnote 38). Variation is encountered with the figures and inscriptions on façades, jambs, and thicknesses (cf. **Figures 4.2-4.3**): Nikauisesi’s façade figures are executed in sunken relief, while those on the entrance thicknesses are in raised relief (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 33); the figures and inscriptions of Ankhmahor are all sunken relief (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 26). Chauvet (2007a) suggests that relief decoration can be employed in Old Kingdom tombs to create and designate different ‘environments’.

Roeten’s description of the ‘inviting’ function of images on façades is not comprehensive. However, it could be mooted that figures of the deceased on and around entrance doorways prompt visitors to move into the tomb by being oriented in that direction. Harpur ascertains that figures on the façade and door jambs of Saqqara tombs are oriented as if entering it (1987: 49 and table 4.7). However, she also observes that figures of the deceased depicted on entrance door thicknesses are usually oriented as if exiting the tomb (ibid. 53). As the façade, jamb, and thickness images can be viewed simultaneously when walking past the entrance from either direction (see **Figures 4.2-4.3**), this would provide the viewer with a contradictory ‘message’ about movement, undermining the suggestion that images of the tomb owner prompt visitors to move into the tomb.



Figure 4.2: Detail of Nikauisesi’s tomb façade. Figures of him on the jambs and thicknesses (see left side) face in opposing directions. Note the different scales on which Nikauisesi and his son are shown (right side). Source: Author’s photograph.



Figure 4.3: Detail of right side of Ankhmahor’s tomb façade. The figure of him on the door thickness faces in a different direction than those on the door jamb and adjoining area. Source: Author’s photograph.

Also counting against the suggestion that figures mirror desired movement is Harpur’s argument that the tomb owner is being depicted in a stationary position instead of a moving one (i.e. standing rather than striding) – subsidiary figures are very occasionally seen facing the deceased (for example, a son, or a person censuring), thus impeding a striding movement, while some figures of the tomb owner are actually seated (ibid. 49-51) (see **Figure 4.3** and

Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pls. 1-2, 34-35). She also notes that the tomb owner is, at Giza, sometimes depicted on entrance thicknesses as if entering the tomb, and on door jambs as entering the tomb on one side and exiting it on the other (1987: 53; Roeten 2014: 251-52, footnote 25). Harpur's evidence therefore counters, or at least nuances, Bolshakov's proposition that images on Old Kingdom tomb façades and door thicknesses portray the deceased leaving and returning to the tomb, respectively (1997: 93-94).

Nevertheless, it can be proposed that the inviting function is one of catching visitors' attention rather than directing movement. Bolshakov states that depictions of the tomb owner on the façade attract visitors and deter those who would desecrate the tomb, although he does not detail how this is achieved (1997: 94). It is plausible that an elaborate tomb façade would alert passers-by to the high status of the deceased, materially demonstrating, through scale and decoration, that the tomb owner had the resources to commission such a work. As Robins suggests, a display of status might serve to "impress people" and urge them to give offerings or recite an offering formula (2016: 115). In a densely packed necropolis, the façade might well have been an effective way to attract people. The elaborate decoration still present on some façades, such as those of Mereruka and Merefnebef (**Figures 4.4 and 4.5**, respectively), supports the deployment of images to visually impact visitors, as demonstrated below. However, visual representations only implicitly justify the giving of offerings. Texts are used in a more explicit way to convey this idea, as explored in the second half of this chapter.

Symmetry is a common visual feature of more and less elaborate tomb façades, as seen above in the examples of decorated entrance jambs and thicknesses, on which pairs of figures of the tomb owner facing into or out of the tomb are commonly found (cf. **Figures 4.2 and 4.5**). I suggest that the symmetrical arrangement of figures acts to 'frame' the doorway of the tomb and to highlight it as a salient feature to visitors, even if these figures do not prompt people to enter. Images used in symmetrical arrangements are frequent in tomb decorative programmes. I discuss symmetry and framing in more detail in **Chapter 7**, focusing on internal tomb decoration, but here I give three illustrative examples of how symmetry is deployed on tomb façades to 'invite' the viewer's attention.



Figure 4.4: Detail of Mereruka's decorated temenos wall and façade, viewed from the south. The standing figures on the wall, and the seated figure on the façade, face the tomb entrance (out of shot, to the right).

Source: Author's photograph.

Mereruka's tomb façade has a decorated low temenos wall located against its south-west corner⁵⁸ (**Figure 4.4**), and its faces feature the tomb owner's name and various titles, together with images of him striding in the direction of the tomb entrance (21 text and image groups are preserved). It is not clear whether this wall was originally mirrored by another wall on the other side of the façade. Although the façade is now very damaged, there is a seated figure of Mereruka on each far corner (the west corner is visible in **Figure 4.4**, left side) and these face the entrance; originally there were further seated figures on either side of the entrance doorway, also facing it. Additionally, there are striding figures on either side of the doorway, facing into the tomb, and on its thicknesses, facing out of it. These figures, all appearing in pairs, frame the tomb entrance and draw attention to it.

While Mereruka's tomb façade is damaged, that of Merefnebef's west (main) chapel⁵⁹ is exceptionally well preserved and very elaborate (**Figure 4.5**).

⁵⁸ The temenos wall forms a small courtyard that contains an offering installation (comprising a false door and *htp* offering table) for Mereruka's son, Khenu. A similar wall might have originally featured in the south-east corner of the complex (Kanawati et al. 2010: 34).

⁵⁹ Merefnebef's complex also includes a very small chapel (the 'east chapel') added after the tomb's original construction (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 56-57, 249-50).

Image of façade removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al 2004.

Figure 4.5: Line drawing of Merefnebef's west chapel façade (door and niche thicknesses not visible). The doorway is highlighted via the use of symmetrically placed text and figures of the tomb owner on either side of the door; the outer façade provides further elaboration.
Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. XI.

Merefnebef's façade comprises an inner niche, set back into the rock face, and an outer façade that surrounds this niche. The outer façade features a lintel bearing Merefnebef's name and titles. The walls below the lintel, to either side of the inner niche, bear the remains of striding figures, but these areas are very weathered (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 66). The inner niche is visually dominated by eight figures of Merefnebef, which are striking in their size and symmetrical arrangement – four on either side of the door, facing it. Above these figures are vertical rows of text, arranged so that the hieroglyphs face the same direction as the figures. As the inner niche is set back into the rock, there is a thickness on each side, each featuring a figure of Merefnebef striding away from the tomb. The overall result is a very elaborate composition that frames the entrance to the tomb.

The lintels of Merefnebef's inner and outer lintels do not employ symmetrical arrangements of text, as the text is read predominantly in one direction (right to left). A contrasting example is the lintel from the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep (**Figure 4.6**), which surmounts the portico entrance. The text of this lintel is read from the middle outwards, with one of the tomb owners' names and titles presented on each side. In this example, the eye is drawn to the mid-point of the text, from where each reading must begin. Additionally, the text differs only at the outer edges, where the name of each tomb owner is written, perhaps highlighting the similarities (titles) and differences (names) in their identities.

Image of lintel removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Harpur 1987.

Figure 4.6: Line drawing of entrance lintel text from the joint tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep. Arrows denote direction of reading, beginning in each case from the centre.
Source: Adapted from Harpur 1987: fig. 12.

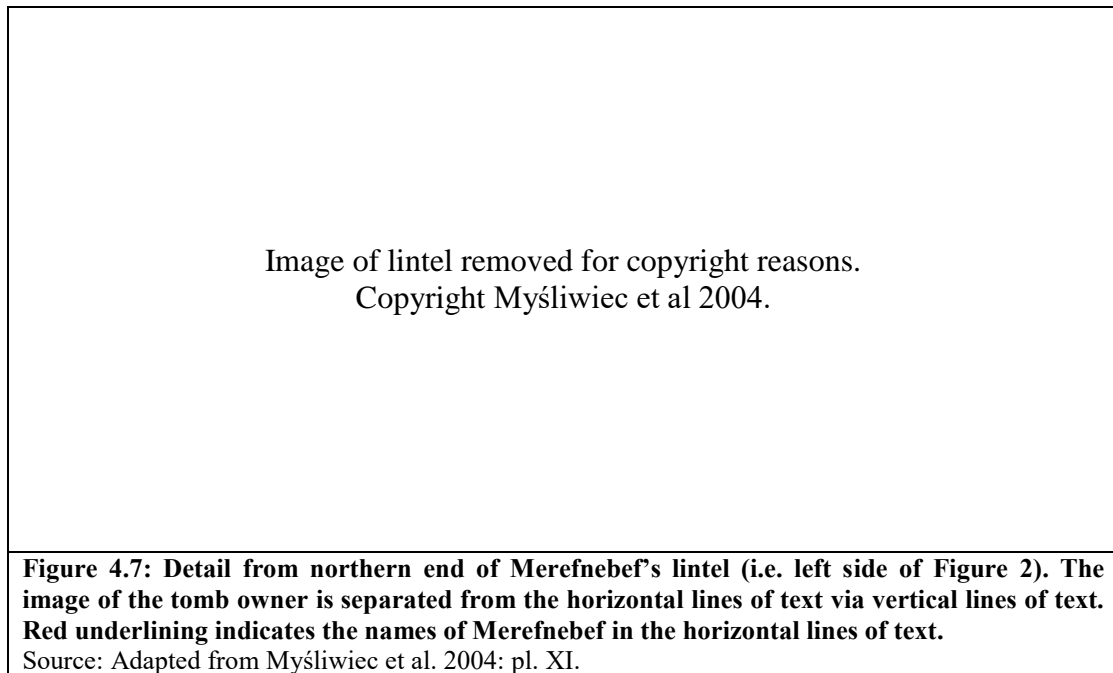
Although not all lintels 'frame' the entrance through symmetrical arrangements of text, they nonetheless communicate (signal) the tomb owner's name and titles to viewers, thus turning the discussion now to the 'signalling' role of façade decoration.

The 'signalling' function

Merefnebef's inner lintel exhibits features that 'signal' his identity using text *and* image. Unlike the outer lintel, the inner one features text juxtaposed with an image of the tomb owner⁶⁰, who appears together with images of his son and wife (barely preserved)⁶¹ (**Figure**

⁶⁰ Nyankhnefertem's tomb, which neighbours Merefnebef's, has a lintel with a very similar layout. Merefnebef's tomb was built earlier and the decoration of Nyankhnefertem's was influenced by it (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 138, 277). Nyankhnefertem's lintel is inscribed with four rows of horizontal text

4.7). These are placed at the extreme left edge of the lintel, and are bordered by two vertical columns of text, which separate the images from the four lines of horizontal text. The two columns display Merefnebef's name, together with a small selection of his titles⁶². While the main content of the four lines of horizontal text is an offering formula and an appeal to the living, each line ends with one of Merefnebef's names (his 'great' names, Merefnebef or Wenis-ankh, or his 'beautiful' name, Fefi⁶³) and a seated male determinative, the form of which indicates that the named person is a deceased noble (Gardiner 1973: 447, sign A50).



Merefnebef's son and wife are depicted on a much smaller scale than he is, and thus the relative importance of the tomb owner in this context – his tomb – is highlighted through size⁶⁴ (see further **Chapter 7**). His identity is not just provided in image form, but also in text form. His different names, both 'great' and 'beautiful', could be considered to indicate various aspects of his identity, as different names could be acquired at different life stages, and even relate their owner to the king under which they lived and/or served⁶⁵ (Günter 2013: 4-5). His titles reveal yet another aspect, namely his professions and social status.

terminating on the left-hand side in a vertical column of text and standing figure of him together with his wife and named son, who are depicted on a much smaller scale than him.

⁶¹ The image of his wife is hardly visible, and the image of the son appears to have been chiselled out (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 74).

⁶² For a full list of Merefnebef's 32 titles, see Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 48-50.

⁶³ For the 'great' (or 'major') name and the 'beautiful' name, see Günter 2013: 3. For Merefnebef's names, see Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 47-48.

⁶⁴ Relative size is an indicator of social importance not only in tomb imagery, but in Egyptian art overall (see Nyord 2013b: 153-55).

⁶⁵ One of Merefnebef's names is Wenis-ankh ('Wenis (the king) is living').

Harpur posits that images of the tomb owner on lintels are likely determinatives, especially when they face in the same direction as the accompanying text and are separated from the text by a vertical line and/or vertical text, as in Merefnebef's example (**Figure 4.7**) (1987: 44). The figures are usually on a larger scale than the text and therefore may stress that the depicted person is the one to receive the offerings mentioned (ibid.) Presumably linked to this idea of iconicity, she adds that multiple figures on the lintels of tomb entrances might be interpretations of, and more economical alternatives to, rock-cut statues that are rare in Saqqara tombs (ibid.) Examples of this rock-cut statuary are discussed in **Chapter 5**. If the images did play one or both of these roles, they could be considered as having a 'signalling' role as they communicate the tomb owner's identity to a visitor. However, as I will argue in the next sub-section, the function of images of the tomb owner goes beyond that of signalling identity and status, as such images might play a 'presentifying' role.

Before moving on to the notion of 'presentification', a final aspect of 'signalling' must be addressed, which relates particularly to tombs that have portico entrances (such as those found at Ty's tomb and at the joint tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep) and wider entrance thicknesses (such as Merefnebef's tomb). This signalling function is one of communicating to visitors that they are entering a special 'environment'.

Chauvet's 2011 study investigates the different 'environments' ('outside cosmic', 'ritual', and 'liminal') that are communicated to the viewer through the various types of scenes found in porticoes and in tombs without porticoes, but with wider entrance thicknesses (and hence space for decoration). Some of these scenes are more difficult than others to connect explicitly to offering cult activity, but Chauvet demonstrates that elements of design were used to portray the space as a location of interaction between the living and dead (ibid. 261-62 *et passim*).

Chauvet relates the 'ritual' scenes in porticos (particularly those involving statues) to the funeral, rather than to the subsequent mortuary cult (ibid. 277-80). However, the scenes are relevant to the cult in that they signal more broadly that that tomb is an environment in which the living carry out ritual activities such as censuring, butchery, and the bringing of offerings – all of which may appear in portico decoration and sometimes on wide door thicknesses.

For example, the lower register of each of Merefnebef's entrance thicknesses features a boating scene⁶⁶: the captions beside the scene indicate that the boats are bringing gifts for the tomb owner; each boat is oriented eastwards, i.e. into the chapel, and is being met at a river bank by offering bearers⁶⁷ (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 86-92). On the northern thickness, a statue of the tomb owner is pictured on the boat⁶⁸ accompanied by men who might be performing a ritual, as they are in a bowed position with hands raised and joined by another standing figure, potentially a priest (ibid. 91-92). These images signal to the viewer an explicit connection between the tomb owner (depicted in statue form), the tomb itself (by virtue of the images' location), and the bringing of offerings (via the ritual elements of the scene, the transport motif, and the text captions). These particular scenes therefore indicate offering-related actions that the living carry out for the dead.

Aside from boats, themes found on entrance thicknesses at Saqqara include others associated with ritual and offering actions: the dragging of statues, butchery, and (occasionally) offering table scenes (Harpur 1987: 56-58, and table 4.8). Harpur notes that butchery scenes appear on entrance door thicknesses (from the latter part of the 5th Dynasty), and concludes that these external locations might have been used during rituals that involve animals (ibid. 57). On entrance thicknesses at Saqqara, statue transportation scenes are often found alongside images of cattle slaughter and butchery; like Chauvet, Harpur suggests that a meat offering was made to the statue of the deceased before it was situated in the tomb (ibid.) Therefore, these images can be considered to communicate particular offering-related activities to the viewer, and perhaps the location in which they are carried out.

Moving to an example of a portico entrance, imagery that both frames a tomb entrance and relates directly to offerings is found on the south wall of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep's portico. Their two pillars that front the portico each bear a vertical line of text giving the tomb owner's names and select titles – Niankhkhnum on the right (west), Khnumhotep on the left (east). The back (south) wall of the portico houses the doorway to the tomb proper, and images of the tomb owners that feature here are visible when moving between the pillars.

⁶⁶ Myśliwiec et al. suggest that boats are depicted on entrance thicknesses as this location “reminds one of the place chosen for genuine boats in this period's largest mastabas, which imitated royal burials in this respect as well” (2004: 92). See also Chauvet 2011 for a discussion of the boat scenes featured in porticoes and whether or not these might be considered ‘ritual’ in nature. Harpur posits that the positioning of boating and aquatic scenes in porticoes and on entrance thicknesses imitates that in royal monuments (1987: 56-57). But cf. Chauvet (2011), who contests the ‘emulation theory’ of portico development.

⁶⁷ Upon discovery, the boat scenes were coated in a thick layer of white gypsum that obscured most of the imagery (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 86).

⁶⁸ Myśliwiec et al. posit that the upper and lower registers of the thicknesses form a “semantic entirety” whereby the figures depicted in registers *above* the boats might be considered as being *aboard* them (2004: 92).

Image of portico removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Moussa and Altenmüller 1977.

Figure 4.8: Top part of the south wall of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep's portico, stretching along the width of the wall above the door. Standing and seated images of the tomb owners at each edge act as a frame. Arrows denote the direction of reading for the bottom-most line of text.

Source: Adapted from Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: Abb. 4.

On the south wall, depictions of the tomb owners frame the door. They are large in scale, one on each side, standing on papyrus skiffs while fishing and fowling. The area directly above this (**Figure 4.8**), which stretches across the width of the wall above the door, includes three horizontal rows of texts starting and terminating in a striding figure of the tomb owners, one on each side. The line of text immediately above the door, as with the abovementioned outer lintel, is read from the middle outwards as it again bears the names and titles of each tomb owner – one on each side. Although the other two lines of horizontal text are read right to left, symmetry is created by depictions of the tomb owners at the edges, which frame the overall composition and the door below.

Particularly relevant is the very top area of the south wall, which is occupied by a scene of the two tomb owners seated at offering tables and reaching toward the loaves of bread on top. Further offerings are depicted beneath each table and between the two tables, while offering bearers and men butchering cattle are shown among the register of images just above the horizontal lines of text. These images explicitly signal to the viewer that the tomb is a location in which offerings are to be provided for the deceased. Chauvet suggests that the portico decoration of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep's portico is to be 'read' from bottom to top: the decoration corresponds to a move from an 'cosmic', outside environment (the tomb owners fishing and fowling) to a 'ritual', inside environment (the tomb owners seated at the offering table), with the portico constituting a liminal space between the outside, profane world, and the sacred interior of the tomb (2011: 268-72, 274).

As Chauvet argues, it could be that such images also denote that the portico is itself an area in which offerings can be given, although she refers particularly to offering rituals carried

out during the funeral, rather than in the subsequent cult (ibid. 261). While I discuss offering installations in the outer areas of tombs in **Chapter 5**, it could be suggested that images of the tomb owner on façades and portico walls could themselves be the recipients of offerings made in these areas – that is, if the deceased is made manifest in such a way as to enable this. I argue that the term ‘presentifying’ encompasses aspects of inviting and signalling, as well another key aspect: that of manifesting the deceased for ritual purposes.

A third function: ‘presentifying’

As established above, the decoration on tomb façades and in porticoes can communicate various pieces of information to the viewer about the tomb owner’s identity and status, and about the ritual nature of the tomb. Although the communication of the tomb owner’s name, titles, and status is referred to as ‘signalling’ above, I suggest that this term does not adequately convey all that the images and texts are accomplishing.

Parts of the signalling role played by the images, names, and titles of the tomb owner on the façade could instead be described as ‘presentifying’. The notion of presentification was introduced in **Section 3.ii** (see Nyord 2017). Presentification encompasses some of the functions of signalling, as the manifestation of the tomb owner can be understood as including his social identity. However, it also goes far beyond this part of signalling. It accommodates the possibility that a representation can be effecting and also affected: because the image realises the presence of the deceased, he/she is made manifest and thus able to participate in a given (ritual) situation.

Presentification is a significant notion in relation to the external decoration of tombs, for it supports the idea that some types of offerings could be made to the deceased in the outer areas of the tomb, and provides a conceptual understanding of how this is possible, i.e. there is ontological communion between a depiction (the image of the deceased) and what is depicted (the deceased him/herself). If the tomb owner’s presence was effected through their name, titles, and image, they could then receive offerings from visitors who did not venture further into the tomb. The image, name, and titles of the tomb owner, which appear prominently on the elements as described above, are crucial. However, offerings should ideally be given at false doors, the cultic significance of which is discussed in **Section 5.ii**. False doors may feature in the outer areas of tombs, but where they do not, perhaps it was preferable for visitors to progress inside to an offering installation.

Returning to issue of the name(s) of the tomb owner, it should be noted that the name (*rn*) was not simply a means of identification in Ancient Egypt, but an inalienable aspect of a

person (Bolshakov 1997: 154; Günter 2013: 1-2, 6). Its preservation, especially within the tomb, as well as its pronouncement, would ensure the continued post-mortem existence of a person (Günter 2013: 6). Bolshakov stresses that the name was in itself a manifestation of the person (1997: 154). He has explored the relation of the *rn* to the *k3*, suggesting that these were in some instances synonymous, yet are not identical concepts; the *rn*, like the *k3*, gave rise to what he terms a ‘Double’ of the person by way of a representation of sorts (ibid. 154-57). Importantly, the name and titles of a person are accompanied by a representation of them, at least in the form of a hieroglyphic determinative (ibid. 155). This echoes Harpur’s aforementioned comment regarding the function of images that accompany texts on lintels and architraves.

In Bolshakov’s opinion, the combination of name and depiction serves to “identify a person more exactly”, with the phonetic part being the *rn* and the determinative being a representation, i.e. the *k3*; this is why the erasure of a name and/or image of a person from their tomb was tantamount to the erasure of their existence (ibid. 156-57). Bolshakov also remarks that while the name and image of the tomb owner was significant in maintaining the deceased’s existence – as the “mere mention of the name could ensure immortality even without any cult” – it was preferable for living participants to pronounce the name during the recitation of the offering formula (ibid. 156).

While subsidiary figures, such as members of the tomb owner’s family, may appear on tomb façades and in outer areas, they are depicted on a smaller scale (for example **Figure 4.2**, right side: Nikauisesi is represented on a larger scale than his son). Additionally, while they may be labelled with names and perhaps titles, these are displayed in a less prominent fashion than those of the tomb owner. Although it could be argued that these subsidiary figures are also being presentified and could therefore receive offerings, the scale on which the tomb owner is represented, together with the often elaborate inscription of their name and titles, plus the frequent inclusion of texts – particularly offering formulae and appeals to the living – make it absolutely clear to visitors that the intended recipient of ritual action is the tomb owner. Appeals to the living also justify why offerings should be presented to the deceased, and in what manner.

4.ii. Appeals to the living

A common element of the tomb façade (and occasionally other areas) is an inscription addressing passers-by and visitors to the tomb. Among my selection of tombs at Saqqara, those of Ankhmahor, Merefnebef, Nikauisesi, Ty, and Seankhuiptah feature informative

examples of ‘appeals to the living’. Appeal texts call for offerings to be made to the tomb owner, and set out the desired conduct of people entering or passing the tomb; they may also describe the potential ramifications of improper behaviour towards the tomb and mortuary cult⁶⁹. In addition to discussing the examples from the core tombs, for which I provide my own transliterations and translations, I utilise examples from other Old Kingdom tombs, drawing on the study of appeal texts conducted by Shubert (2007)⁷⁰. These provide further details on the roles of cult participants and offering-related actions.

Reciprocity and consequence

The appeal texts in the outer areas of the tombs elucidate the positive and negative results of proper and improper behaviour, respectively, as related to the tomb itself and the offering cult carried out there. They mention conduct, both of the living and of the deceased, in ways that relay notions of reciprocity: visitors will benefit (in life and eventual death) if they behave appropriately at the tomb, just as the deceased behaved well in various ways during their own life and hence is deserving of offerings and respectful treatment⁷¹.

Gaining the king’s favour is also a theme in the texts: this would be highly desirable, not only as the king could grant a place for burial, but also as he, together with the gods, could provide resources to support the cult, including ‘reverted’ shares of royal and divine offerings to elite individuals⁷². This is exemplified in the *hṯp-di-niṣwt* formula, which features in all of the selected tombs, and details the offerings granted by the king and a variety of gods alongside the occasions on which they are to be presented⁷³. Correct behaviour, i.e. conduct that would garner royal and divine favour, would result in certain

⁶⁹ The legal aspects of the mortuary cult’s operation, which are sometimes outlined in tomb texts, such as on the east wall of room I in Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep’s tomb (for which see Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: 87-88 and pl. 28; Strudwick 2005: 194), will not be discussed here due to the limitations of this study.

⁷⁰ Shubert provides a discussion of the key studies of the appeal texts (2007: 2-9). The most notable studies of Old Kingdom appeals to the living are Garnot (1938) and Edel (1944). Müller gives a historical overview of the appeals (1975), as does Lichtheim, who also addresses grammatical aspects (1992). The texts are explored in other works as a sub-set of tomb biographies (Redford 1995: 2232-33 and 2000; Kloth 2017) or of offering formulae (Leprohon 2001), or in connection with threat formulae (Morschauser 1991) or curses and blessings (Nordh 1996).

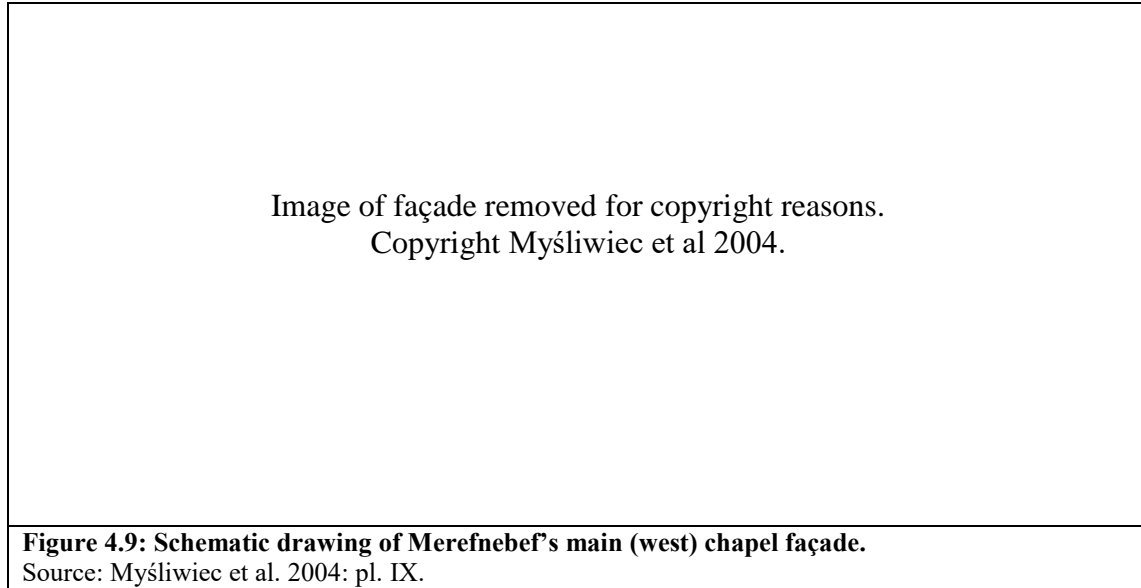
⁷¹ The upstanding behaviour and achievements of the tomb owner are often mentioned in biographical texts inscribed in the tomb (for which see footnote above).

⁷² For royal involvement in private Old Kingdom tomb building, see Chauvet 2007b, with further references regarding the royal financing of funerary endowments; see Khaled 2016 concerning royal funerary domains; see Legros 2016: 129-33 for comments on the role of the king and administration in the private cult, and on the reversion of offerings.

⁷³ During the Old Kingdom, the *hṯp-di-niṣwt* formula is to be understood as an offering given by the king and gods; the gods are the donors and not the recipients of the offerings (Lapp 1986: IX; Franke 2003: 40-41). Lapp’s extensive study of the forms of the offering formulae (including the *pṛt-hrw*) demonstrates that they fall into two principle groups: one predominantly connected with the request for mortuary offerings; the other with the request for a burial (1986: IX). The offerings may derive from the possession of the deceased or from the possession of the king or temple (ibid.)

rewards for the elite – in this way, reciprocal relationships could extend beyond the living and dead to the king and gods.

Before entering a tomb, visitors are urged to be in a ritually pure state. A connection may be made between this exhortation and water basins (potentially used for ritual cleansing), found in the outer areas of tombs (see further **Chapter 5**). Yet the appeals to the living also imply that eating certain (unspecified) foods would lead to ritual impurity. The ramifications for the living, should they enter the tomb in an impure state, are clearly stated in the texts.



The appeal on Merefnebef's west chapel façade, on the north side of the doorway (F7B, **Figure 4.9**), specifies that the king has given him an allotted space⁷⁴ in a pure place (*rdi n(=i) igr nīswt šspt=f m bw w'b*) for his tomb⁷⁵ (hieroglyphic text Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 81, column 15, and pl. XVI). The third line of the appeal on the inner lintel (F6, **Figure 4.9**) outlines the consequences for those entering the tomb in an unclean state, and thus desecrating the purity of the space: 'As for all people who will enter this (my) tomb of eternity in their impurity, having eaten the impure things⁷⁶ that the *akh* who has gone to the necropolis abhors, without having removed their impurity, in the manner in which they (should) purify (themselves) for (i.e. entry into) the temple of god, their punishment will be given very harshly on account of it by the great god...' (*ir rmt [nb 'q.t](y)=sn r is(=i) pn n dt m 'b(w)=sn wnm.n=sn bwt bwt 3h nt(y) hp(y) r hrt-ntr ny wd'=sn 'b(w)=sn mī w'b=sn r hwt-ntr nt ntr rd(i)w sdb=sn hr=s dw wrt in ntr 3*) (hieroglyphic text Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. XIV).

⁷⁴ For *šspt* see Erman and Grapow 1971, Vol. IV: 535.

⁷⁵ Hetepherakhet's appeal to the living similarly states that his tomb is built in a 'pure place' (*m st w'bt*) (see Shubert 2007: 357).

⁷⁶ On the subject of *bwt* ('impure/abhorrent things'), see Frandsen 2001; 2011.

There is very similar content in Nikauisesi's appeal, on the west side of the doorway: '...[As for all people who will enter] into this (my) tomb without purifying (themselves) as (they) should purify (themselves) for a god, (I) will cause them punishment for the great evil(doing)' (*[ir rmt nb 'q.t(y)] = sn r is(=i) pn ny w'b = sn m' w'b[=sn] n ntr iw(=i) irt n = sn h'sft r dwt wrt*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pls. 4, 43).

In the tomb of Ty, the appeal to the living appears next to his image in the entrance passageway to the interior of the superstructure. The text on the east side is better preserved than the west, which is highly damaged. It can be ascertained that the east text includes warnings similar in content to Merefnebef and Nikauisesi's appeals: the tomb should not be entered in an impure state due to the consumption of things that an *akh* detests, and visitors should be pure in the same way as for entering the god's temple (transliteration Sethe 1933: 173, lines 9-14⁷⁷; see also Shubert 2007: 55-57). Ty's inscription also records the result of anyone who enters the tomb in an impure state: '...they will be judged (lit. 'there will be judgement together with them') on account of it by the great god in the place in which judgement is (exacted), truly' (*[wnn] wd3-mdw hn' = sn hr = s in ntr 3 m bw nty wd3-mdw im m3'*) (transliteration *Urk. I* 173.14-15; see also Shubert 2007: 55-57).

The texts from Merefnebef, Nikauisesi, and Ty's tombs, as described above, underline that ritual purity is an essential prerequisite for the living before entering the tomb and that if this requirement is not met, the deceased and/or the great god (i.e. the king⁷⁸) have the ability to exact punishment on them.

Ankhhmahor's tomb façade appeal (south side) reveals that it is due to the state that the tomb owner has attained in death – that of an *akh* – that the living must ritually purify themselves: '...as they (should) purify (themselves) for an excellent *akh* who did that which his lord praised' (*...m' w'b = sn n 3h iqr irr h'sst nb = f*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pls. 2, 35; see also *Urk. I* 202.3-5; Shubert 2007: 23-24). Moreover, as the deceased has behaved according to his lord's (i.e. the king's) wishes, this provides additional justification for the living to behave in an appropriate way at his tomb. A reciprocal aspect is clear here: the deceased behaved well in life and therefore the living should behave well towards him in death.

⁷⁷ Sethe's 1933 publication of Old Kingdom texts is hereafter referred to as *Urk. I*, followed by the relevant page number(s), a full stop, and then the line number(s) – for example, page 173, lines 9-14 would appear as *Urk. I* 173.9-14.

⁷⁸ 'Great god' (*ntr 3*) likely refers to the deceased king under whom the tomb owner served and the one who could grant the tomb owner a peaceful afterlife (Bárta 2011: 235; see Berlev 2003 for the title *ntr 3*).

It also lists the ramifications for those who enter in an impure state: ‘I will seize his neck like a bird so that fear of me will be placed in him, so that the *akhs* and those who are upon earth may see (it) and fear an excellent *akh*; I will contest him⁷⁹ in that noble council of the great god’ ([*iw(=i) r irtt ts*]=*f mi 3pd wdy(w) snd(=i) im=f r m3 3hwt tpyw t3 snd=sn n 3h iqr* [*iw(=i) r wd*]^c *hn=f m d3dt tf špst nt ntr 3*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pls. 2, 35; see also *Urk. I* 202.6-9; Shubert 2007: 23-25).

Seankhuiptah’s façade includes on its east side an additional interesting ramification for the living, should they enter the tomb in an impure state; although it must be noted that this part of the text is damaged: ‘there will be no *ka* for him (lit. ‘there is not his *ka*’)⁸⁰; it will not be well for him before the god; he will not be buried in the necropolis’ (*n k3i=f n nfr n=f hr ntr n qrs=f m hrt-ntr*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: pls. 24c, 64b). The repercussions outlined here are stark. They include not only unfavourable judgement for a perpetrator, but also the denial of a burial for them, and perhaps even the loss of their *ka*⁸¹. This builds upon the information about reciprocal behaviour above, indicating that the living will face issues surrounding *their own* post-mortem existence if they do not conduct themselves fittingly at the tomb. If the living do not adhere to the code of behaviour involved in performing the cult, they themselves will lack a burial and thus a cult of their own.

Indeed, some appeal texts include explicit references to the performance of the offering cult at the tomb. The inscription south of the doorway of Merefnebef’s west chapel (F7A, **Figure 4.9**) reveals the result yielded by improper action regarding the operation of his cult: ‘Oh visiting ones, [living ones]! As for all people who shall do an evil thing against this (my) tomb, against an invocation offering, against a *ka* priest, I will cause for him (i.e. each person) an ending on account of it (i.e. the wrongdoing) in their (i.e. the transgressors’) presence because fear of me had not been placed in him, in order that those who are upon the earth will see (it) and (then) they will fear the *akhs*, which shall revive in the whole land’ (*i šmw n3w ir rmtw nbw ir.t(y)=sn ht dw r is(=i) pn r prt-hrw r hm-k3 iw(=i) r irt n=f phw(y) hr=s r-gs=sn n dy n(=i) snd im=f r m3 tpyw=sn t3 snd=sn n 3h(w) ms(y).wt(y)=sn m t3 pn r-dr=f*) (hieroglyphic text Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 77, columns 9-15).

The south side of Ankhmahor’s tomb façade threatens a like-for-like retaliation if his tomb is harmed: ‘As for anything that you have done against this (my) tomb (of) the necropolis, so the like will be done against your property (i.e. tomb)’ (*ir ht nb(t) irt=tn r is(=i) pn (n) hrt-*

⁷⁹ In a judicial sense.

⁸⁰ Kanawati and Abder-Raziq note that this expression appears to be incomplete (1998: 49, footnote 199). However, this very expression is cited by Edel (1955-64: §1091).

⁸¹ On the ‘possession’ of one’s *ka*, see Nyord 2019.

ntr [*wnn irw mit*]/*t r išwt=tn*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pls. 2, 35; see also *Urk. I* 202.1; Shubert 2007: 23-24).

As well as conveying to tomb visitors the negative effects of inappropriate conduct, the appeal texts also communicate the benefits of appropriate behaviour. As might be expected, the texts indicate that good behaviour results in support rather than condemnation in matters of judgement and of burial. The appeal texts from Nikauisesi, Ankhmahor, and Ty all demonstrate this.

While the west side of the inscription on Nikauisesi's tomb façade states the consequences of visitors' impurity, the east side records the benefits of purity: 'But as for any *ka* priest (of my) estate who brings forth his voice (i.e. makes invocation offerings) for me and purifies (himself) for me, he can gain confidence because of it that I will support him (lit. 'hold his hand') in the necropolis and in every council' (*[ir]* *swt hm-k' nb (n) dt(=i) pr=f n(=i) hrw w'b(=f) n(=i) r nht ib=f r=s iw(=i) r mh 'f m hrt-ntr m d3d3t nb(t)*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pls. 5, 44).

Ankhmahor's tomb façade (south side) appeal contains a comparable section: 'But as for any man who will enter into this (my) tomb in a pure state, on account of whom I become satisfied, I will be his supporter in the necropolis and in the council of the great god' (*ir swt s nb 'q.t(y)=f(y) [r is(=i) pn] w'b(w) htp(=i) hr=f iw(=i) r wnn m h3y=f m hrt-ntr m d3d3t nt ntr 3*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pls. 2, 35; see also *Urk. I* 202.10-11; Shubert 2007: 23-24). The tomb owner appears to be promising to lend his support in return for any man who is purified and who gives offerings (for the word *htp* see **Section 5.ii**). Similarly, Ty's appeal states that for anyone who enters in pure state: *iw(=i m) h3y=f m d3d3t tf špst [n(t) ntr 3]* 'I will be his supporter in the noble council [of the great god]' (*Urk. I* 174.3; see also Shubert 2007: 55-57).

In addition to receiving support from the great god (i.e. king), reception of the king's praise is also promised to those involved in the burial of the deceased. Another appeal in Ankhmahor's tomb, this time found on the sarcophagus lid in the burial chamber, addresses the '80 men', embalmers, and necropolis administrators who descend to the chamber, and asks them a rhetorical question: (*i*)*n iw mry=tn hsy tn niswt* ('Do you wish for the king to praise you?') and continues: *pr=tn hrw (m) hrt-ntr wnn im3hw=tn nfr hr ntr 3* ('(If so, then) you should make invocation offerings in the necropolis (and then) you will be venerated completely before the great god') (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pl. 69; see also *Urk. I* 205.2-4; Shubert 2007: 25). Once again, the potential future state of the living is

contingent upon them carrying out certain actions – in this case, offering to the dead on an ongoing basis after they have buried him. The promise of the living achieving such a state is used to encourage them to make offerings.

Receiving praise, and reaching an old age, are results revealed in the appeal from the tomb of Inti at Deshasha (6th Dynasty, not in my core selection). It states that anyone who enters the tomb and praises the tomb owner will have the like done for him, and that anyone who wants a burial of their own and who protects the deceased's (tomb) property will be honoured by the god and pass to his *ka* (i.e. die) at an old age (Shubert 2007: 19-20).

The tomb façade of Metjetjy at Saqqara (6th Dynasty, not in my core selection) adds several useful pieces of information regarding the behaviour of visitors. Firstly, that those who bring or invoke offerings will rejoice with Osiris and be honoured by Osiris (gods associated with the necropolis). Secondly, that 'there will be no bread and beer' (i.e. mortuary offerings) for someone who commits a transgression against the tomb owner or indeed harms any *akh* spirit in the necropolis. Finally, it reveals that the giver of the offerings gains greater benefits than the recipient (*iw(=f r 3h n) ir(r) [r irrw n=f st]*⁸²) (hieroglyphic text Kaplony 1968: pl. I; transliteration Shubert 2007: 34-36). The end of Metjetjy's appeal then further underscores the importance and positive nature of providing offerings, adding that giving bread and beer to the dead in the necropolis is a 'beneficial deed' (*iw is 3h*), with the tomb owner also stating that he will make this fact known to any son, brother, or man of his estate who comes to give invocation offerings (*prt-hrw*) for an *akh* (ibid.)

From all of the texts above, we can ascertain that the benefits received by those who perform the mortuary cult and enter the tomb in purity include: gaining the support of the tomb owner, both in the court of the great god and in the necropolis; a burial of their own; the achievement of particular states (old age, veneration); praise from the king and/or gods; and recognition for 'beneficial deeds'. Regarding the deceased supporting the participants, we can infer that they gained the ability to do so through the socio-political power and ethical standing that they attained in life; façade texts often emphasise both the social status and ethical behaviour of the tomb owner (Helck 1952: 41-42).

Tomb owners did include statements about their 'moral' behaviour during life in their façade texts. In Merefnebef's appeal text (F7A, columns 16-26), the tomb owner describes his own

⁸² 'It is more effective for one who does (it) than for one for whom (it) is done'.

proper behaviour during life as having included performing *ma'at*⁸³, propitiating the god, and making invocation offerings for the effective spirits (i.e. the deceased), as well as honouring his parents and acting benevolently to certain groups of weak or wronged people (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 77, 79-80, pl. XV). Ultimately the king rewarded Merefnebef's good deeds and appropriate behaviour with an equipped tomb in a clean space, as we read above. From this chain of events, it can be ascertained that good actions during life, which include making offerings to the dead, in addition to earning the king's favour, may lead to rewards in death, including the provision of a tomb.

Reciprocity plays a vital part in the relationship between the living and the dead, as evident in ancestral cult practices in Ancient Egypt (see Moreno García 2016). Certainly, it is a key component of the appeals to the living and one that is utilised to elicit offerings⁸⁴. Just as the aforementioned texts indicate that tomb owners have earned the right to their tombs through their correct behaviour during life, they also illustrate the benefits that tomb visitors might reap if they act appropriately with regard to the tomb and its cult.

The deceased, having achieved *akh* status, were perceived to be able to intervene in the world of the living, in positive and negative ways (Harrington 2013: 22-27, 34-37). So-called 'letters to the dead' provide numerous examples of attempts made by the living to contact the dead in order to ask for their assistance in matters of daily life – if the dead assisted the living, the latter would provide offerings and libations for the former; and conversely they would cease to make offerings if no help was given⁸⁵. The appeal of Isi at Saqqara (6th Dynasty, not in my core selection) states that if people give him offerings, he will 'intercede for them in the place where the *akh*-spirits are', thus providing a clear message of reciprocity (translation Shubert 2007: 21-22).

It is clear that the living and dead relied upon one another in particular ways, with the dead requiring offerings and the living needing the benefits gained from giving them. Offerings were thought of as significant enough to be used as a bargaining tool between the two parties. Appeal texts set out a code of conduct for those who pass by or enter into the tomb, revealing not only that correct behaviour was important for reaping benefits (for the dead and the living), but also that there was the expectation that people would be visiting the necropolis in order to read the texts (and that they *could* read them).

⁸³ *Ma'at* can be translated broadly as 'justice' or 'cosmic order' – see Assmann 1989 and 1990b; Helck 1981; Hornung 1987. For *ma'at* in Old Kingdom appeals to the living, see Lichtheim 1992; for *ma'at* as related to the concept of *htp*, see Davies 2018: 82-91.

⁸⁴ Bolshakov also suggests that appeals to the living incited passers-by to recite the offering formula, but they would do so for what he terms "moral reasons" (1997: 169).

⁸⁵ See for example Wentz 1990: 212 no. 342, 214 no. 347, and 215 no. 349. See also p.182 below.

The texts show a desire for people to be actively engaged at the tomb site in offering-related actions. As will be discussed next, they stipulate the particular offering-related actions to be carried out (beyond the conduct just mentioned), and call upon particular groups of people.

Offering actions and actors

The appeals to the living may address specific groups of people holding particular titles and roles, as well as people in general, i.e. anyone who might be passing by the tomb. Family members do not feature prominently in the appeal texts, i.e. they are not often addressed directly unless legal aspects of funerary estates are outlined. The texts appear to draw upon as large a pool of offerors as possible, yet – somewhat ironically – only literate visitors would be able to read such an appeal⁸⁶. The ritual actions that groups of people are called upon to perform will be discussed next, as these highlight the expected or desired input from prospective participants in respect of the mortuary cult.

Priests are referenced frequently in the appeal texts, as might be expected⁸⁷. Here will be mentioned only the relevant actions that these people are asked to perform and the ritual knowledge that they are said to possess, as set forth in the appeal texts.

Merefnebef's text (F7A) stipulates that malicious acts against the *ka* priest⁸⁸ are unacceptable, likewise against the tomb, and against the invocation offerings of bread and beer, implying that these things are closely linked (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 76-80 and pl. XV). Nikauisesi's text lists two actions that the *ka* priests are to carry out: purification (*w'ḥ*) and invocation offerings (*pṛt-ḥrw*). This highlights the centrality of voice offerings in the cult and implies that someone giving voice offerings should be purified, and therefore that even verbal recitations should be accompanied by additional, ritual actions (purification) presumably carried out at the tomb.

The services of *ka* priests, and others, are mentioned in appeals from Saqqara tombs outside of my core selection, such as that of Bia/Irery at Saqqara. Bia holds the title of lector priest himself, and it is the *ka* priests who are urged to 'give bread, beer, and water (as) the reversion offering (*ḏbw-rd*) of my lord'; the appeal also specifies that an invocation offering should come forth for the tomb owner's father from 'every companion, every son,

⁸⁶ Contra Bolshakov, who suggests that "any passer-by was turned into a priest", implying that everyone passing a tomb was literate enough to read an appeal text and/or the offering formula (1997: 169).

⁸⁷ A delineation of the various priestly titles in existence during the Old Kingdom, and the other titles that officials often held alongside them, cannot be included here (but see Baer 1960, Sauneron 2000, Strudwick 1985, and Teeter 2011).

⁸⁸ For the role of the *ḥm k3* – a low ranking priest, but one heavily involved in cult activity – see Daoud 2018: 112-16.

everybody, and every scribe' who shall pass the tomb and 'who shall read from this door' (*šd.t(y)=f(y) ʕ pn*) (Wilson 1954: fig. 1, inscription B; see also Shubert 2007: 26-27). This text demonstrates that everyone who can read is being encouraged to do so – and, moreover, from the false door⁸⁹ of the tomb. This gives us identities of cult participants, a mode of offering, and a location for action. While I suggest above that visitors may be able to make offerings in the outermost areas of tombs, especially if the tomb owner is 'presentified' through imagery, this text highlights that the false door is considered a key ritual point.

As mentioned above, Ankhmahor's sarcophagus bears an appeal not to priests, but to the '80 men' (*rmtw ḥmntyw*), embalmers (*wt(yw)*), and 'necropolis administrators of every rank' (*ḥqʕ(w) ḥrt-nṯr iʕt nbt*)⁹⁰ urging them not only to secure the sarcophagus lid, but to make offerings in the necropolis (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pl. 69; see also *Urk I* 205.1-8; Shubert 2007: 25). These people were involved in the funeral of the deceased, as depicted in the decoration of some Old Kingdom tombs (for examples, see Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 63, footnote 301). However, their role appears to extend (ideally) to the ongoing cult, as the text implies.

Certain personnel, including priests and embalmers, would be able to provide ritual expertise beyond the capacity of the average visitor (Shubert 2007: 354). This is demonstrated in the appeal from on the right (north) of Ankhmahor's façade. Although is damaged down one edge, we can read this informative section: 'O (any) lector priest who shall come to this (my) tomb in order to carry out effective rituals (lit. 'things') for me according to this secret writing of the craft of the lector priest...]' (*[i ḥry-ḥb i]w.t(y)=f(y) r is(=i) pn r irt n(=i) ḥt ʕḥ(t) ḥft sš pf šṯ n ḥmt ḥry-hbt*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pls. 1, 34; see also *Urk. I* 202.15-16; Shubert 2007: 23-25, 354-55). The text is then broken, but includes the words *šd.n(=i) sʕḥw* ('recite for me the (texts of) spiritualisation')⁹¹. This indicates that priests were thought to have special access to restricted knowledge key in allowing the deceased to become – and remain – an *akh*⁹².

Many tomb owners held priestly titles themselves. Therefore, the tomb owner could be appealing to people of a similar social standing, or at least those who are privy to the

⁸⁹ See Wilson 1954: 243-47 and fig. 2.

⁹⁰ Kanawati and Hassan suggest that it might be incorrect to translate embalmers and necropolis administrators in the plural (1997: 63-64). The omission of human figures (including determinatives, which can pose problems when translating texts) in the burial chamber is mentioned in **Section 6.iii**.

⁹¹ Literally 'causing to be (in the state of) an *akh*'. The Egyptian word *sʕḥ* literally means 'cause to become effective' (Erman and Grapow 1971: Vol. IV, 22-23). It refers to the transformation undergone by the deceased, via ritual, in order to be active and powerful after death.

⁹² On the knowledge that tomb owners claim to have regarding becoming an *akh*, see Hays 2011 (particularly 123-126, in which the texts of Ankhmahor, Merefnebef, Mereruka, and Ty are mentioned).

required knowledge. For example, Ankhmahor is ‘chief lector priest’ (*hry-hbt hry-tp*), ‘sem priest’ (*sm*), and ‘superintendent of priests’ (*shd hm(w)-ntr*) of the pyramid of Teti (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 11-12). Having knowledge of ‘secrets’, particularly in relation to the king, appears in many official titles in the Old Kingdom – Merefnebef alone holds a plethora of titles containing the component ‘privy to/master of secrets’ (*hry-sšb*)⁹³ (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 48-50).

People with priestly roles, if trained as scribes, would be able to read particular ritual texts out for the deceased. However, as Shubert notes, the verb for ‘to read’ (*šd*) is the same as that for ‘to recite’ and it is used for both recitation aloud and recitation from memory (ibid. 355). An appeal text from a 6th Dynasty Giza tomb door jamb (now in the Cairo Museum, JE44608) implies that the invocation offering formula could be passed on orally, as it asks *ka* priests to make invocation offerings as the tomb owner did for their own ancestors, and to tell their children the words of the invocation offering (*mdt nt prt-hrw*) for the tomb owner (transliteration and translation Shubert 2007: 39). It is therefore highly possible that the invocation offering could be pronounced from memory, rather than being recited from a text – not all appeals to the living contain the words of the *prt-hrw*.

However, it might have been necessary to read texts with religious ritual content from a written source, to ensure that the correct formula was being followed and hence the effectiveness of the utterance (Redford 2000: 166-67)⁹⁴. Redford asserts that the acts of reading and speaking aloud go hand-in-hand and, moreover, that “the spoken word itself contained a quasi-magical force”⁹⁵, and its intonation liberated the power of the written text” (ibid. 159-60). He specifically cites examples of addresses to the living that call upon readers to speak the texts aloud, noting that *listening* to the recitation seems to be important, i.e. an audience might even be present (ibid. 159-61, 171-76).

If texts play a key part in conducting ritual, the literacy level of potential participants must be considered. As mentioned above, appeals to the living include a wide range of people in their addressees, including any passer-by (Baines and Eyre 2007: 72). However, literacy would be required to read such an address. Redford argues that visitors to the necropolis would likely be people of means and also literate; he notes that many appeals to the living

⁹³ For this title, see Rydström 1994; Jones 2000: Vol. II, 609, no. 2233 (and 609-646, nos. 2234-2366 for its variants).

⁹⁴ On the subject of reading and speaking aloud, particularly during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, see Morenz 1996.

⁹⁵ The addresses to the living, *hṯp-di-nṯswt* offering formula, and ‘magic’ spells (among other genres) can be termed as ‘audible statements’ (*tpt-rʔ*), according to Redford (2000: 173). The role of ‘magic’ in the ‘activation’ of offerings is discussed in **Chapter 8**.

specifically address groups of people with roles that require scribal training (such as priests and nomarchs), as well as any living person who might be passing the tomb (2000: 154-57). The extent to which Old Kingdom necropoleis and the individual tombs were accessible to various social groups cannot be ascertained with certainty.

The issue of literacy in Ancient Egypt, including literacy rates and the definition of literacy itself, is a thorny one⁹⁶. The use, experience, and consumption of texts extended beyond reading to incorporate orality, performance, and other senses including the visual (Zinn 2018: 68-69). Restrictions to the access of text stemmed not only from the literacy level of the reader, but also from social considerations. Access to certain written knowledge was limited to those holding particular social positions (ibid. 70). Even if prayers for the dead could be recited from memory and transmitted orally, the issue remains that it might have been deemed necessary to recite certain rituals or rites from a text to ensure their efficacy (Redford 2000: 166-67, 181-82). Perhaps during the funeral, or on completion of the tomb, key rituals were carried out from written sources and, subsequent to this, the actions of participants – carried out according to their literacy level and resources – would suffice as long as they incorporated the vital aspects of speech and gesture.

Whether from memory or from a written source, the act of verbalising the invocation offering appears to be vital. As will be demonstrated, *gesture* also seems to be important, alongside the action of purification before speaking. The appeals sometimes include requests for the living to provide tangible offerings as well as invocations; this appears during the 6th Dynasty and continues in the First Intermediate Period (Shubert 2007: 368). Several appeals suggest that there is a *physical aspect* to invocation offerings, in the form of perishable offerings or bodily gestures – speech is not the only component. Both the living in general and various groups of priests are addressed in these cases. Moreover, captions accompanying images in the tomb interior also suggest that invocation offerings were accompanied by perishable offerings. As Lapp observes, the term *pṛt-ḥrw* can refer both to the act of making an offering accompanied by the voice, and the offerings themselves (1986: 96).

Further appeal texts – from 6th Dynasty Saqqara tombs not in my core selection – indicate that providing physical items was more desirable than speech. The appeal from the tomb of Nedjemib asks those who are living and who pass by to ‘pour out water for (me, as) I am the master of secrets (and) bring forth an invocation offering for (me) from that which is with you (i.e. in your possession)’ (*stī n(=i) mw ink ḥry-sšṯ pr n(=i) pṛt-ḥrw m ntt m-ḥt=tn*) (*Urk.*

⁹⁶ On the topic of literacy in Ancient Egypt, see Baines and Eyre 2007, Redford 2000, and Zinn 2018.

I 75.10-12; see also Shubert 2007: 41-42). The tomb façade of Metjetjy (now in Berlin (32190) and in a private collection) asks the following of all those who are still living: ‘may you invoke offerings consisting of everything that is in your hands’ (*pr=tn hrw=tn m ht nb(t) wnnt=s m (=tn)*) (hieroglyphic text Kaplony 1968: pl. I).

An inscription from Nyankhpepy’s tomb also addresses those who are living and states: ‘Pour out water and beer for me from that which is in your possession (*m-ht=tn*). If there is nothing in your possession, then you should speak with your mouth (*dd.kʒ=tn m r(ʒ)=tn*) and offer with your arm (*wdn m-(=tn)*) bread, beer, beef, fowl, incense and pure things...’ (transliteration Shubert 2007: 36-38). It should be noted that this text comes from the false door and not the tomb façade, but it indicates the importance of gesture and its perceived efficacy, although it is not as preferable as speech⁹⁷. Appeals from both the east wall of the entrance passage of Khui’s tomb and the north entrance jamb of Ka-aper’s tomb include very similar lines of text and use the same vocabulary for speaking with the mouth and offering with the arm if nothing is in the visitor’s possession (translation *ibid.* 47-48; hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1996: pls. 16 and 49b).

Outside of Saqqara, the tomb of Pepiankh Hery-ib at Meir (6th Dynasty) emphasises the gestures that should be made during offerings: ‘...by means of your two hands is how you should raise it up and offer (it) with your mouths’ (*ʃʒ[=tn] m-ʿwy=tn wdn=tn m rʒ=tn*) (transliteration *Urk. I* 224.2-3; see also Shubert 2007: 27-28).

The ideal is that some sort of tangible and/or perishable offering be made in addition to a verbal recitation and gesture, as will be elaborated on in **Section 7.iii**.

4.iii. Conclusion

While images and texts on the various elements of tomb façades do not explicitly invite movement into the tomb, they do ‘invite’ the viewer’s attention through visual devices – notably, elaborate compositions and framing achieved via symmetrical elements of decoration. Elaborately decorated façades that include the name, titles, and images of the tomb owner, signal their identity to passers-by, impressing upon them their social status and, implicitly, their worthiness to receive offerings.

The term ‘signalling’ can be used to describe the roles of façade decoration in indicating to visitors that they are entering a ritual environment, and communicating the identity of the tomb owner to them. Regarding the latter, I propose that the term ‘presentifying’ is wider-ranging, as it encompasses the notion that images and texts can make the depicted figures

⁹⁷ The potential hierarchy of offering modes is discussed in **Section 7.iii**.

manifest for ritual purposes, particularly as names, titles, and depictions are all intrinsic to the Egyptian conceptualisation of a person.

Further, the appeals to the living highlight the details of the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead. The two parties relied on each other: the dead needed the living to provide offerings for post-mortem sustenance; and the living required the opportunity to demonstrate their own appropriate behaviour that they might gain a burial and mortuary cult in future. The actions of the living at the tomb in respect of offerings and offering-related behaviour (such as ritual purity) could result in significant positive or negative consequences.

The appeal texts suggest that there was (ideally) a physical aspect of the *pwt-hrw* invocation offering. Perishable food and drink was desired from visitors, but a bodily gesture with the arm or hand was acceptable in its absence, as long as it was accompanied by a verbal component. As such, making offerings was an involved act.

There is some evidence to suggest that a basic invocation offering could be recited from memory, providing the deceased's name was known, although reading from a textual source might have been preferred for accuracy and efficacy. Despite varying literacy levels of visitors, the signalling, inviting, and presentifying functions of images could be readily understood. As will be seen in later chapters, a range of communicative means were deployed to encourage participation from the living.

Chapter 5. The design and use of offering-related tomb features

The previous chapter established that decorative elements of the tomb façades communicated to visitors their desired participation in the cult, and provided reasons – implicitly and explicitly – for such participation.

This chapter analyses the physical design of the offering-related installations in both the inner and outer areas of the tombs. I focus on the actions that the design features suggest to visitors and permit them to carry out, that is, their ‘physical affordances’. I argue the offering-related installations ‘afford’ ritual use, both eliciting and allowing interaction between the living and the dead. In turn, this strongly suggests that the living were required to carry out ritual actions there as part of the mortuary cult.

As the findings indicate the necessity of active participation in the cult, they also call into question the notion that the deceased could rely on ‘magical’ offerings in the form of images, texts, and objects, to sustain them, independent of input from the living.

5.i. The concept of ‘physical affordances’

Renfrew’s four principle criteria for identifying ritual practice in the archaeological record (1985; 1994) were introduced in **Section 3.i**. The space in question (here, the tomb) was likely used for ritual activity when it: exhibits attention-focusing devices; acts as a boundary zone between this world and the next; features images to make the ‘deity’ (here, the deceased) present within; and evidences offering activity there (1994: 51-52, citing Renfrew and Bahn 1991: 359-60). Renfrew’s aim is to *identify* a space as having been used for ritual activity. As the features that he notes are all exhibited in Egyptian tombs, my aim in this chapter is to move beyond their identification. I demonstrate that these features were designed to be used by the living in the offering cult and consider the types of actions that the living might have carried out in connection with them. This is achieved through an investigation of the ‘physical affordances’ (action possibilities) of the offering-related installations.

As noted in **Section 2.iii**, the term ‘affordance’ derives from phenomenology and describes the action possibilities that objects offer. The term was coined by psychologist James Gibson (1979, see especially 170-89). Gibson refers to affordances using the construct of *verb phrase* plus the suffix *-able*; for example, he characterises surfaces as “*climb-on-able* or *fall-off-able* or *get-underneath-able* or *bump-into-able* relative to the animal” (ibid. 171; Scarantino 2003: 950-51). However, the definition of affordance has since been expanded and evolved by scholars within various fields. Notably, the affordances of objects may now

be understood as being *indirectly* perceived, and not only (as Gibson suggested) *directly* observed without internal, mental mediation (Knappett 2005: 44-45; 2009: 87-88).

Knappett (2005) utilises the idea of physical ‘affordances’ of objects⁹⁸ in order to investigate the ways in which humans perceive and react to the world – and “think *through* material culture” (ibid. 50, italics in original). He combines relational approaches⁹⁹, that is, approaches that consider mind and matter as co-dependent, with explicitly cognitive approaches borrowed from branches of psychology (ibid. 43-45)¹⁰⁰. He argues that “...we essentially find ourselves at a point that can be described as post-Gibsonian, in which the affordances of objects are understood simultaneously directly and indirectly, through both execution and evaluation, and in terms of embodiment as well as representations” (ibid. 48).

Broadly speaking, the question being addressed by such approaches is: how do humans gain, process, and act upon information about the ‘things’ around them? An examination of how installations and related architectural features might encourage and enable the living to participate in the offering cult allows for a discussion – which evolves in the later chapters – about the agency of both people and things in this ritual context.

While Knappett identifies three different aspects of affordances to consider when analysing material culture – relationality, transparency, and sociality¹⁰¹ – I focus on one, which broadly accords with relationality: what an object or feature can be utilised for given its physicality and context. I do not discuss the transparency and sociality of installations and features, because, as stated in **Section 1.iv**, my study presupposes that tomb visitors in Ancient Egypt would possess a certain level of cultural knowledge, sharing the culture of the tomb owner. Beyond the objects being created for a particular use, and that use being evident to the users, they encourage use through their physicality, layout, decoration, and location.

⁹⁸ I examine ‘modal affordances’, i.e. communicative possibilities of modes, in **Chapter 7**.

⁹⁹ Knappett creates an approach that builds on Renfrew’s concept of ‘engagement’, which is a type of ‘relational’ stance (2005: 43; Renfrew 2001 and 2004).

¹⁰⁰ See also Knappett 2009, in which he develops a semiotic strand of this approach, which he terms ‘situated semiotics’.

¹⁰¹ The three aspects are: relationality (what an object can ‘do’ depends partly on the user and situation); transparency (the function of an object might require the user to have certain cultural knowledge); and sociality (an object may be used by more than one agent and accordingly have different perceived affordances) (Knappett 2005: 45-47). The term ‘transparency’ appears to be practically interchangeable with the social semiotic term ‘convention’ – both denote an implicit level of cultural knowledge that is required in order to ‘read’ an object or sign. Regarding ‘sociality’, Van Leeuwen similarly notes that while the affordances of an object are visible, people may perceive different affordances because perception is subjective (2005: 4-5, 273).

5.ii. Physical affordances of offering-related installations

Basins

The requirement for cult participants to be ritually pure was discussed above in relation to the appeal texts. In addition to its importance in mortuary cult activities, purity was a prerequisite for priests before they entered temple spaces (Sauneron 2000: 36, 87-89). Renfrew notes that water sources are usually present in connection with the boundary area between non-ritual and ritual spaces, with pools and basins being important for purification activities prior to entering the latter (1985: 19; 1994: 51). Water had not only ritual, but also mythological and cosmic significance in Ancient Egypt. Life emerged from water according to creation myths and it was believed to have life-giving properties (Sauneron 2000: 36).

<p>Image of offering basin removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2003.</p>	<p>Image of offering basin removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2003.</p>
<p>Figure 5.1a: Inscribed, standalone offering basin from Kaiemheset's chapel. Note the similarity in shape between this basin and the small basin feature in Akhethotep's offering table (Figure 5.2). Source: McFarlane 2003: pl. 8b.</p>	<p>Figure 5.1b: Line drawing of Kaiemheset's inscribed offering basin. Source: McFarlane 2003: pl. 43a.</p>

Basins afford the containment of water, which can be used for ritual purification or, potentially, making liquid offerings; some of the above-mentioned appeal texts include exhortations to the living to 'pour water' for the deceased, and lists of offerings that appear on tomb walls include water. In tombs, basins occur as standalone elements (see **Figures 5.1a-b, 5.3, and 5.4a-b**), including in the outer, liminal areas, and/or as one of multiple features in offering table design¹⁰² (see **Figures 5.2 and 5.5a**). Offering tables are most commonly found in conjunction with false doors, which themselves constitute a liminal zone between the living and the dead, as will be discussed further below.

¹⁰² For a detailed typology and study of Old Kingdom offering tables and basins, see Hölzl 2002: 13-26; see also Mostafa 1982.

Hölzl (2002) draws a clearer differentiation between offering tables and basins than Mostafa (1982). However, Mostafa notes that tables in the form of one or two troughs are referred to by a separate term (*š* = ‘pool’, rather than *ḥwt* or *ḥtp*, ‘offering table’) in documents from the Old Kingdom (ibid. 116). First I will focus on standalone basins that are not integrated into offering tables alongside other features, before moving onto integrated examples.

Image of offering basin removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Hölzl 2002.

Image of offering basin removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Hölzl 2002.

Figure 5.2: Top and side view of carved granite offering table featuring multiple design elements, including a small basin (back, centre). From the chapel of Akhethotep, Saqqara¹⁰³. Chapel and offering table in the Louvre Museum (E10958, E10958B). Source: Hölzl 2002: pl. 11.

¹⁰³ This chapel is not among my core selection, but this offering table is used as an example of one with multiple different features on its surface. This Akhethotep is not to be confused with the joint owner of the double tomb of Akhethotep and Ptahhotep, which is in the core selection.

Image of offering basin removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 5.3: Basin from the tomb of Merefnebef.

Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. LXXXVI.

In the south-eastern corner of Merefnebef's complex, in the outer area, is a rectangular basin (2.0m x 0.8m) built on the same level as the foundations of the east chapel, which was likely added after the tomb's original construction after access to the main chapel had been prevented by a landslide (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 41, 56, 60, 248-49) (**Plan 5.1**). The basin is constructed from two rows of *tafla* bricks¹⁰⁴ angled inwards and coated in mortar (ibid. 60) (**Figure 5.3**).

The specific function of the basin is unknown and no objects were found in association with it, but circular patches of burning (0.2-0.3m diameter) were discovered in front of each niche in the east and south walls of the mastaba (ibid. 55) (niches visible in **Plan 5.1**). The excavation report does not record the type of mortar used to coat the bricks, so whether the installation would be waterproof is unclear¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ *Tafla* bricks are made from marl, a calcareous desert clay called *tafla* in Arabic (variant English spelling *tafel*) (see Lehner and Wetterstrom 2007: 201-202).

¹⁰⁵ The properties of gypsum and lime plasters and mortars differ. Gypsum is comparatively easier to work, but soluble in water. In contrast, lime is much more water resistant, but is slower to set (van Pelt 2015: 80-81).

Image of basin relative to chapels removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Plan 5.1: Location and size of Merefnebef's basin (outlined in red) relative to the east and west chapels.
Source: Adapted from Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. VI.

The basin is not located near other offering features, such as a false door; it could be argued that the basin relates to the false door and offering table in the east chapel, but because of its small size, the basin was not situated directly in or next to it. If used to make offerings before a false door or on an offering table, water from the basin would have to be transported in a container to the chapel. However, evidence from later periods, especially the New Kingdom, highlights that libations could be made outside of tombs, including in courtyard areas (Harrington 2013: 61-62)¹⁰⁶.

Merefnebef's basin might have been used for making libations, as it is very similar in appearance to an inscribed limestone basin found in the interior of the chapel of Kaiemheset¹⁰⁷ (0.82m x 0.55m, max depth 0.20m (McFarlane 2003: 26)) (**Figures 5.1a-b**). Kaiemheset's basin comes from the southern half of his offering chapel and probably had an associated niche or false door behind it, which is not preserved (ibid.) It is likely that a false door accompanied the basin of Kaiemheset due to the examples of *in situ* false door and

¹⁰⁶ For examples see Harrington 2013: 61-62. At the New Kingdom site of Deir el-Medina, libation basins have been found associated with ancestor worship in domestic contexts (ibid. 80). Slabs found in New Kingdom houses at Amarna were probably used for cultic lustration (Spence 2007b).

¹⁰⁷ Quibell and Hayter note the discovery of another basin during the original excavation of Kaiemheset's tomb, but the current location of the object is unknown (McFarlane 2003: 37, citing Quibell and Hayter 1927: 18-19).

basin combinations. Although these are not evident among my core selected tombs, the tomb of Sehetepu II¹⁰⁸ provides an example of a double basin located directly before a false door (**Figures 5.4a-b**).

<p>Image of double basin removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2003.</p>	<p>Image of double basin removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2003.</p>
<p>Figure 5.4a: Double basin and false door, chapel of Sehetepu II. Source: McFarlane 2003: pl. 37a, detail.</p>	<p>Figure 5.4b: Double basin viewed from above, chapel of Sehetepu II. Source: McFarlane 2003: pl. 37b; see also pl. 63a.</p>

Another possible use for basins affording the containment of water is for cleaning areas subsequent to their use for the slaughter and butchery of animals intended for offerings. This animal-related activity might have taken place in the entrance porticoes or courtyards of tombs. These areas could offer the required features of open space, access to water, tethering points, and cleanable floors; further, decoration in these areas can include slaughter and butchery scenes, perhaps indicating that such activity was carried out here (Chauvet 2011: 278-79; Ikram 1995: 106-107). While Merefnebef’s basin is located toward the periphery of his complex, it is perhaps more likely that it was used either for personal purification (especially given the emphasis on purity in appeal texts – see **Section 4.ii**), or for libations inside the chapel or in its outer environs. Moreover, other tombs from my core selection feature basins in connection with false doors and offering tables (Nikauisesi and Ty, as described below, and possibly Kaiemheset, as described above).

¹⁰⁸ The tomb of Sehetepu II is almost adjacent to that of Kaiemsenu (among my core selection), to whom he was related (see McFarlane 2003: 96).

Offering tables and benches

Examples of basins integrated into offering tables alongside other features are found at Saqqara in connection with false doors. The offering table of Nyankhnefertem was moved by looters¹⁰⁹, but has since been restored to its original location into a niche carved at the base of the false door (**Figure 5.5a**). The inscribed table¹¹⁰ features two depressions or basins either side of a *hṯp* motif (see **Figure 5.5b**).

<p>Image of offering table and door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010.</p>	<p>Image of hieroglyph removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Gardiner 1973.</p>
<p>Figure 5.5a: Offering table and false door, Nyankhnefertem's offering chapel. Source: Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: pl. XCIV.</p>	<p>Figure 5.5b: The <i>hṯp</i> motif as a hieroglyph. Source: Gardiner 1973: 501, sign A4.</p>

The offering chapel in the tomb of Ty contains two false doors, although only one offering table remains, which includes a *hṯp* sign, a step either side of it (where the *hṯp* sign has been carved from the stone block), and a circular depression in its uppermost surface (**Figures 5.6a-b**). The step feature is also found in Mereruka's tomb, but in a far more pronounced way – the table in front of the large statue of the tomb owner is fronted by multiple steps (see

¹⁰⁹ For the position in which the table was found, see Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010, pl. LXIXb.

¹¹⁰ The inscription comprises a short *hṯp-di-niswt* offering formula with the tomb owner's names and titles.

statuary section below, **Figure 5.26**). However, as Ty's offering table is not so high as to require a step to access it, it could be suggested that the step affords the placement of offering equipment to facilitate ritual activity.



Figure 5.6a: False door and stepped offering table, Ty's offering chapel (room VI).
Source: Author's photograph.



Figure 5.6b: Detail of Ty's offering table (room VI), showing stepped profile, circular depression, and *htp* motif.
Source: Author's photograph.

The circular depression in the surface of Ty's table might have been intended for liquids or perhaps other types of offerings. Round depressions in the surfaces of some tables, such as Ty's, might be understood as the tops of vessels: Akhethotep's offering table (**Figure 5.3**) has depictions of the bodies of vessels on its side, with the shallow circular depressions on the top of the table being their continuation, i.e. their mouths. The depressions are shallow and only afford the containment of a small amount of liquid. Alternatively, Hölzl suggests that these depressions and images on Akhethotep's table represent stands (*Opferständer*) on

which offering plates or tables might be placed, as depicted in tomb scenes and (less frequently) found among tomb objects (2002: 67-68).

Hölzl believes that this interpretation of round elements on offering table surfaces is more likely than that of their symbolising round loaves of bread – while the latter interpretation implies a ‘magical-functional’ role, she argues that ‘functional’ elements are foregrounded during the Old Kingdom (ibid.) Whether the depressions were used for tiny amounts of liquid or for the placement of offering vessels cannot be ascertained with certainty. Nevertheless, either would afford the living physical interaction with the offering surface.

The use of the rectangular depressions for the reception of water is strongly suggested by the appearance of images of ewers (used for pouring water) next to images of basins on offering tables. This is implied by the spout of the ewer being close to, or even touching, the basin (ibid. 67). This is seen in **Figure 5.7**, an example from a Giza tomb. It is therefore likely that basins could be used not only for the reception of liquid offerings, but also for the collection of libation water, which had been spread over the table using a vessel such as a ewer.

<p>Image of offering table removed for copyright reasons.</p> <p>Copyright Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.</p>	<p>Image of offering table surface removed for copyright reasons.</p> <p>Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000.</p>
<p>Figure 5.7: Old Kingdom inscribed stone offering table featuring a ewer and basin combination (Cairo JE53151), found <i>in situ</i> in the tomb of Iymery at Giza (G3098). Source: http://www.gizapyramids.org photo ID o_neg_nr_0362.</p>	<p>Figure 5.8: Detail of the pitted surface of the offering table from Nikauisesi’s chapel. Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pl. 28, detail.</p>

Most examples of offering tables from the selected tombs do not exhibit extra elements such as ewers, elaborate inscriptions, or images; text labels that indicate the use of depressions and other elements are also lacking¹¹¹, but are rare overall (Hölzl 2002: 67). The majority

¹¹¹ Notable exceptions are two *in situ* offering tables in the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep; these do not belong to the tomb owners. One is dedicated to Niankhkhnum’s son, Hem-re, and the other to Hem-re’s wife, Tjeset (antechamber to offering chapel, west wall, positioned at the bases of false doors dedicated to them). In addition to featuring the name and titles of their owners, they both display an image of the husband

feature, or are formed into, a *hṭp* shape. The shape itself recalls the mats on which offerings were placed in front of graves during the Predynastic Period, with the protruding part representing an offering loaf (Bolshakov 2001: 573). An unusual example of a *hṭp* offering slab with a spout and drain cut in its front (i.e. the top of the ‘loaf’) is evidenced in room A11 of Mereruka’s mastaba: this slab is level with the floor, rather than being raised up like a table, and is adjacent to the west wall of the burial shaft beneath (Kanawati et al. 2010: 38)¹¹². In this instance, it seems that the water would run off the table and perhaps be caught by a portable vessel, or else left to drain into the floor.

Although Hölzl treats the *hṭp* sign on offering tables as a ‘magical-functional’ element¹¹³, it might also have acted as visual cue, designating the area in which food and drink is to be placed. Moreover, if the *hṭp* element were large enough, it would afford the placement of physical offerings. In support of the argument that the living came into the tomb and put perishable food on offering tables, rather than simply using speech and gesture, are examples in my core tombs of offering tables with pitted surfaces. The table in the tomb of Nikauisesi exhibits a heavily pitted surface (particularly evident on the ‘loaf’ element of the *hṭp* sign), probably as a result of chemical reactions between the stone and organic offerings placed upon it¹¹⁴ (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 27, 47) (**Figure 5.8**). Likewise, the offering table surface in room A8 of Mereruka’s tomb is pitted from food or liquid (Kanawati et al. 2010: 37). Other examples of pitted offering tables at Saqqara are also attested (see *ibid.*, footnote 331; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2002: 17 and footnote 52).

Benches also indicate that tomb design accommodated and facilitated offering activities carried out by the living. Benches are found in conjunction with offering tables and false doors, including in the tomb of Nikauisesi, where a bench continues the surface of the offering table onto an adjacent (north) wall; it is decorated on its front surface with a cavetto cornice and torus moulding (**Figure 5.9**). Other (undecorated) examples are found in the west chapel of Merefnebef (**Figure 5.10**) and in the tomb of Seankhuptah (**Figure 5.11**)¹¹⁵.

and wife seated at the offering table; further, Tjeset’s features a butchery image, and Hem-re’s a motif of an offeror presenting a bird to the seated couple (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: 157-60).

¹¹² The spout measures 0.25m H x 0.15m W (Kanawati et al. 2010: 38). On my visit to this tomb, the base of the door and its slab were not visible owing to modern additions of metal stairs and grills to access and protect the burial shaft.

¹¹³ I return to the concept of ‘magic’ as related to offerings in **Chapter 8**.

¹¹⁴ During my own visit to the tomb of Nikauisesi, the pitted surface appeared to have been filled in; this must have occurred at some point subsequent to the 2000 publication of Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, from which **Figure 5.8** is taken.

¹¹⁵ It is likely that a bench originally existed in Ankhmahor’s chapel, an extension onto the north wall of the offering table on the west wall (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 20-21). Additionally, in room A8 of Mereruka’s complex, a small limestone block (0.35m N-S, 0.83m E-W, 0.18m high) occupies the south-west corner



Image of bench removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 5.9: Bench in Nikauisesi's chapel, north wall (offering table surface just visible to left).
Source: Author's photograph.

Figure 5.10: Bench in Merefnebef's west chapel, north wall (offering table visible to left).
Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. LIV, detail.

Image of bench removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998.

Figure 5.11: Bench and offering table in Seankhuptah's tomb, Room I, north wall.
Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: pl. 29b, detail.

In all three instances, the surfaces are at approximately the same height as the offering table. It is conceivable that the adjacent surfaces of the tables and benches are at the same height in order to facilitate the transfer of the items between them when rituals were undertaken.

between the offering table and the adjoining wall (see Kanawati et al. 2010: 36-37). Perhaps this was used in a similar way to a bench. Benches are also attested in other tombs outside of my core selection, but within the Teti cemetery at Saqqara (Kagemni, Khentika/Ihhy, Kaiaperu, Ankhmahor, and Neferseshemptah), as well as in the pyramid of Sahure (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 28, footnote 120).

False doors

Purity is often an important factor within ritual spaces and liminal zones (Renfrew 1985: 17-19; 1994: 51). The concept of liminal space is highly relevant to Egyptian temples and tombs, which can be viewed as transitional spaces containing liminal points of contact between different spheres of existence (Spence 2007a: 383-84; Hartwig 2013: 165; Harrington 2013: 86). This liminality is exemplified by doorways¹¹⁶, including portico entrances of Old Kingdom tombs (Chauvet 2011: 261-62, 280).

Within a given culture, a door can act as a symbol and hold multiple meanings; a false door might likewise be a ‘multivalent signifier’ as Meskell suggests (2003: 41, citing Bachelard 1994: 224). In Ancient Egypt, she proposes that the false door acted as a reminder of the deceased’s presence (ibid.)¹¹⁷. However, according to other scholars, its predominant role was to act as a point through which the *ka* of the tomb owner could come forth to access offerings (Anderson 2000: 129; Bolshakov 1994: 15). Due to their close association with the deceased, false doors were usually placed on the west wall¹¹⁸ of the offering chapel – the direction synonymous with the realm of the dead (Bolshakov 1997: 28, 50).

As the term suggests, a ‘false’ door was not intended to physically allow the living to move through it, but did provide a liminal point at which the living and dead could interact. Although academic literature treats the false door as a meeting point between the two parties, the exact form that this ritual contact takes is not specified (Nyord 2013a: 198).

The wooden door¹¹⁹ found to the west of Kaiemheset’s mastaba features an inscription that explicitly connects it with mortuary offering activities, particularly invocation offerings (**Figures 5.12a-b**): “I made this for (my) father (and) for (my) brothers in order (lit. ‘out of desire’) that the voice may come forth to them and also (to me) from (my) property” (*ir(=i) nw n it(=i) n snw(=i) n mrwt prī hrw n=sn hn’(=i) m išt(=i)*) (hieroglyphic text McFarlane 2003: pls. 15, 50).

¹¹⁶ For Egyptian temple doorways, see Accetta 2016, and for false doors, Wiebach 1981.

¹¹⁷ Although Meskell is discussing false doors in relation to ancestor worship in domestic settings, her remarks hold true for those in tomb complexes.

¹¹⁸ The placement of false doors in other walls can be explained by “architectural peculiarities” of the chapels in question; variants in the Memphite necropoleis are rare (Bolshakov 1997: 50).

¹¹⁹ There are few examples of inscribed wooden doors from Old Kingdom tombs that have the ability to open (McFarlane 2003: 42-43; see note 117 for two further examples).

<p>Image of door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2003.</p>	<p>Image of door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2003.</p>
<p>Figure 5.12a: Front (left) and back (right) of the wooden door found near Kaiemheset's tomb. Source: McFarlane 2003: pl. 15.</p>	<p>Figure 5.12b: Line drawing of the front of the wooden door found near Kaiemheset's tomb. Source: McFarlane 2003: pl. 50, detail.</p>

The door appears to be functional¹²⁰ rather than false, as it has pivots, was repaired and strengthened during its use, and measures 2.22m high (excluding pivots) by 0.67-68m wide (McFarlane 2003: 42-43). Although likely functional, this door exhibits some false door features, as it is inscribed with a *ḥtp-di-niswt* offering formula mentioning the recipients as Senefankhu and his children, who are named as Kaiemheset, Kaipunesut, Hetepkai, and Kaikhenet (hieroglyphic text McFarlane 2003: pls. 15, 50).

Scholars' interpretation of the false door as a place through which the deceased was thought to emerge stems in part from the occasional incorporation of images of the deceased in the central niche or 'aperture'¹²¹, as if appearing in it or emerging from it: for example, the doors

¹²⁰ Although no pivot holes are preserved in the doorways of his tomb, McFarlane suggests that it could have come from the entrance to the chapel or the doorway to the pillared hall where there are bolt holes on the internal recess (2003: 42). McFarlane argues that this door originates from Kaiemheset's tomb and belongs to him, contrary to Gunn's suggestion (see *ibid.*, footnote 116).

¹²¹ Images of the tomb owner are common on the jambs of false doors, but here I am discussing the less common depictions that appear in the central niche ('aperture') of false doors.

of Redines¹²² and Idu, both from tombs at Giza (**Figures 5.13** and **5.14**). For Bolshakov, the image of Idu is an example of what he refers to as ‘hinting’,¹²³ in Old Kingdom art, i.e. it alludes to the motif of the tomb owner seated at the offering table that is usually found in the top panels of false doors¹²⁴ (as at the top of the doors in **Figures 5.5a** and **5.14**) (1994: 13-17). In this particular case, the engaged statue of Idu’s torso features outstretched arms, like the hieroglyphic sign for the *k3*, as if he is ready to receive offerings.

However, as I discuss regarding statues below, there is further significance in images of the tomb owner that are depicted face-on, as they are on the doors of Redines and Idu. Face-on depictions afford a shared gaze between the living and the dead. This reciprocal sight (introduced in **Section 3.iii**) is all the more significant because the image of the tomb owner is presentifying him, i.e. he is manifest. Further, in the case of Idu’s image, the particularly deep modelling presents a corporeal impression of his torso, perhaps increasing the impression that the deceased is present in the space with the viewer.

<p>Image of door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.</p>	<p>Image of door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Giza Project at Harvard University.</p>
<p>Figure 5.13: False door of Redines, Giza (tomb G5032, found in situ). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Source: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. https://collections.mfa.org/objects/143899</p>	<p>Figure 5.14: False door and offering table of Idu, Giza (tomb G7102). Source: Harvard Digital Giza Project. http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/photos/53420/full/</p>

¹²² Der Manuelian posits that the image of the tomb owner is not to be understood as striding out of the door, but instead as standing in the centre having already ‘arrived’ to receive offerings (1994: 71-75).

¹²³ Bolshakov’s principle example of a false door and offering table ‘hinting’ at the motif of the tomb owner seated at the offering table comes from Seneb’s late Old Kingdom tomb at Giza: when the offering table was excavated from the ground by Junker, it was found to have a ‘foot’, thus emulating the shape of the offering table on its stand as depicted in the motif (1994, citing Junker 1941: 100).

¹²⁴ Fitzenreiter posits that seated statues are a locus of offerings for the dead, and that this idea is echoed in the motif of the tomb owner seated at the offering table (2001: 529).

These two examples originate from Giza, but of the Saqqara tombs that this study analyses, there is only one that includes the tomb owner in the aperture, and he is not shown face-on: the ‘miniature’ false door of Khnumhotep, which sits in the top register of the wall decoration in the entrance portico of his shared tomb (Chauvet 2011: 277-78, fig. 1; Moussa and Altenmüller 1977, pl. 10) (**Figure 5.15**). There are no false doors among my tomb selection that include engaged statuary (like that of Idu above), but an example is found at Saqqara in the 6th Dynasty tomb of Neferseshemtah (**Figure 5.16**)¹²⁵. This features two standing statues and a bust in place of the customary panel depicting the tomb owner at the offering table. The relief image of Redines on his false door might imitate such a ‘standing statue’ design (Der Manuelian 1994: 71-75).

As intimated above, there is iconographic evidence suggesting that the tomb owner is made present at the door via imagery. However, it should be noted that there is little textual evidence that the deceased was thought to *emerge* from the false door at the recital of the *prt-hrw* formula¹²⁶. Nonetheless, I will next demonstrate that false doors possess decorative features that convey particular affordances for the *deceased’s use*; but that such affordances were ritually controlled by the *living*, therefore underlining the importance of the living’s participation in the cult.

Bolshakov describes the false door as “a more or less volumetric counterfeit of a [functional] door” (1997: 25). However, the volumetric difference between false doors and functional doors is evident from a comparison of the spaces that would open to let someone through, i.e. the sizes of false door apertures versus tomb entrance doorways (**Table 5.1**, pp. 101-102). The heights and especially widths of the false door apertures relative to functional doorways¹²⁷ in my selection illustrate that a person could not travel through the former comfortably.

¹²⁵ See Der Manuelian 1994: 71-73 for Old Kingdom examples of the tomb owner being featured in the central panel of the false door, as either an image in relief, 2D, or a 3D statue.

¹²⁶ While the variant *prt-r-hrw* ‘coming forth at the voice’ occurs during the 18th Dynasty, this could be construed as referring to the offerings, rather than the deceased, permeating the door (see Gardiner 1973: 172). For the *prt-hrw* phrase during the Old Kingdom, see **Section 8.ii**.

¹²⁷ For false door apertures with both height and width recorded in **Table 5.1** on pp. 101-102 (i.e. excluding the doors in court 1A and the southern end of Merefnebef’s west chapel, in the chapel of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, and in the southern side of Nyankhnefertem’s chapel), the average aperture height is 1.19m and width 0.16m. For the chapel entrance doorways with full heights and widths recorded (i.e. excluding those of Ankhmahor, Ihy/Idut, and Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep), the average height is 2.04m and width 0.64m.

Image of door removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Chauvet 2011.

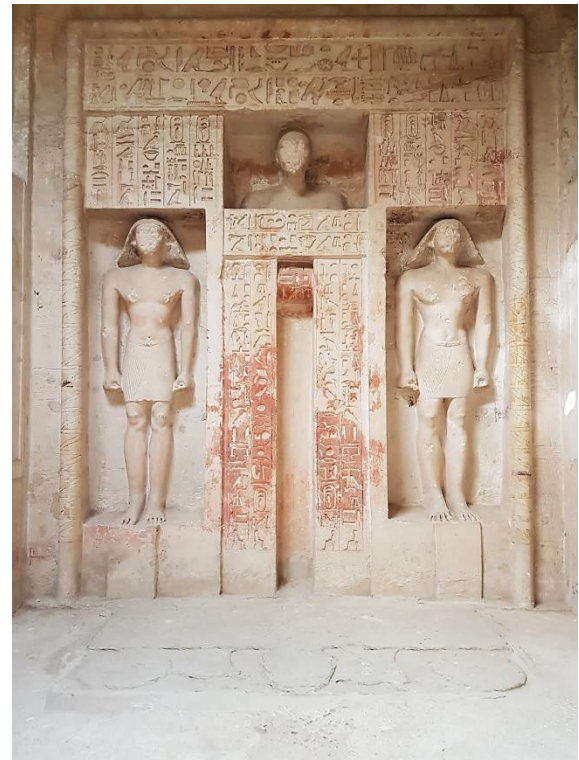


Figure 5.15: Line drawing of the miniature false door of Khnumhotep, from the double tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep.

Source: Chauvet 2011: 278, fig. 1, based on Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: pl. 10.

Figure 5.16: False door of Neferseshemptah with offering table visible in front, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty.

Source: Author's photograph.

It seems instead that the presence of the deceased is controllable via doors with a *ritual* affordance of opening and closing, which is reflected in the *appearance* of *physical* affordances. False doors commonly have a ‘drum’ motif, which likely represents a rolled up mat¹²⁸ secured on the lintel that would, in the case of functional doorways, be let down to cover the opening (Accetta 2016: 46, citing Koenigsberger 1936: 14 and Arnold 2003: 76). False doors may exhibit further details that are found on ‘real’ doors. The occasional appearance of a door bolt decoration within the central niche of the false door suggests that it affords closing and opening. An example is seen in room A11 of Mereruka’s complex: the aperture of the false door is decorated like a functional wooden door with two leaves, a cross bolt, slats, pivot points, and sockets (Kanawati et al. 2010: 38) (**Figure 5.17**). Other examples of false doors decorated this way were found in fragments by Junker in the mastaba of Seshemnefer II at Giza¹²⁹ (**Figure 5.18**).

¹²⁸ The polychrome painted decoration of the northern false door on the west wall of Ptahhotep II’s chapel likely represents matting (Davies 1900: 6-7, pls. XIX-XXA; Harpur and Scremin 2008: 214-15, figs. 306-13).

¹²⁹ Tomb G5080, western cemetery (Junker 1938). Another false door from this tomb is held in the Roemer-und Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim. Junker’s reconstruction places the doors in the south wall of the serdab (1938: 187-92, figs. 33-34); Kanawati suggests that the doors were placed about one metre above floor level and associated with the eight statue compartments in the room (2002: 55-56). For a discussion of the role of statues in the offering cult, see the ‘statuary’ section below.

<p>Image of door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Duell 1938.</p>	<p>Image of door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Giza Project at Harvard University.</p>
<p>Figure 5.17: Line drawing of false door with double leaves, bolts, slats, pivots, and sockets. Tomb complex of Mereruka, room A11. Source: Duell 1938 vol. II, pl. 107.</p>	<p>Figure 5.18: Reconstructed limestone false door with double leaves, bolts, slats, pivots, and sockets. From the tomb of Seshemnefer II, Giza. Now in the Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin (BÄM 21600). Source: Harvard Digital Giza Project. http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/objects/54394/full/</p>

A cross bolt attaches to one door leaf and slides into cleats in the other, and would be operable from the side on which it appears (Accetta 2016: 50, citing Behrens 1984: 256-57). Although double door leaves would usually be pushed inwards, they could in the case of niches and naoi be opened toward the user (Accetta 2016: 312)¹³⁰. As depictions of door bolts and leaves appear on false doors¹³¹ on the side of the tomb visitor¹³², it implies that the living could ritually control the deceased's movement. The door in **Figure 5.18** appears to open towards the visitor as there are pivot holes at the base of the door and these are usually located on the side of the leaves that the door opens into (ibid. 47). The door in **Figure 5.17** also appears to open toward the visitor, as the pivot points are visible, and even though it has a drum, which would prevent a 'real' door from opening this way, it could simply be a visual reference to a 'real' door.

¹³⁰ An Old Kingdom example of double door leaves fronting a statue niche comes from the 3rd Dynasty tomb of Hetepi. This chapel had a niche in its western wall that likely contained a figure of the tomb owner and was closed off by double doors, as evidenced by the hinges in the floor (Bárta 2011: 119).

¹³¹ See Wiebach 1981: 154-59 regarding these features on Old Kingdom false doors.

¹³² An interesting contrast is provided by the motifs found on offering tables at the bases of false doors: whereas door bolts are clearly visible to the tomb visitor, offering table motifs are generally oriented 'upside down' from their viewpoint, but 'the right way up' to the tomb owner emerging from the door. However, text on offering tables is often oriented so that the visitor may read it (for example, that in Nyankhneferem's chapel – see Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 162, fig. 55).

The direction in which these false doors would hypothetically move is uncertain, and their features might act as visual cues to identify them as doors rather than reflect conscious decisions by the craftsmen to indicate the way in which they open¹³³. Nevertheless, the choice to include visual cues identifying them as akin to ‘real’ doors is significant: these features are visible to visitors; they reinforce their conceptualisation as liminal points; and they illustrate the idea that the deceased’s movement through the door required input from the living.

Even when decorations reminiscent of a functional door are present on a false door, the fact remains that it does not physically open. False doors do not afford the passage of the living, but I suggest that they could have been perceived as affording the passage of the *deceased* and can therefore be considered *ritually* functional. Additionally, some captions in decorated tombs state that offerings are carried ‘to (*hr*) the false door’¹³⁴, implying that this is the location at which they can be received by the deceased. It is possible that the *ka* of the deceased was thought to pass through false doors, although this idea is not supported directly by the *pṛt-hrw* formula. Nonetheless, captions highlight the significance of the *ka* of the tomb owner in connection with offerings.

If the tomb owner was thought to come forth from the false door, this would reflect a difference in conceptualisation of the dead versus the living in Ancient Egypt: a deceased person, or an aspect of them, can permeate apparently solid objects. The false door creates not only a sense of liminality, but also one of separation, as there is an illusion of a space beyond it that cannot be accessed by the living¹³⁵.

However, the existence of the *pṛt-hrw* formula indicates the involvement of the living in providing sustenance for the deceased at the site of the false door, although it is unclear whether the recitation is *required* in order that the dead might be able to receive offerings. As offering tables and basins, which include ‘functional’ receptacles, are found in conjunction with false doors, this further supports the idea that these installations served as focal points for ritual actions that were carried out by cult participants.

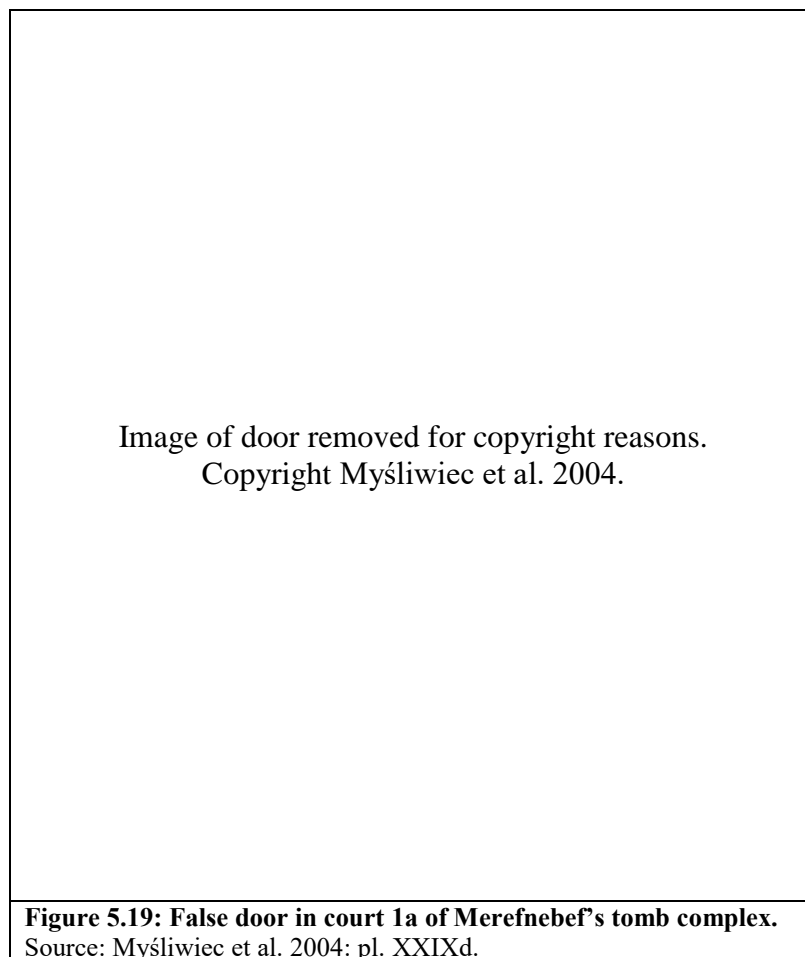
The importance of participation by the living might explain the occurrence of false doors in outer areas of tombs, in addition to those found in the interior. False doors in courtyard and

¹³³ K. A. Accetta, personal communication, 31 December 2017.

¹³⁴ See Wiebach 1981: 75-76 for two examples of such a caption from Saqqara: one from the tomb of Snfrw-nfr and the other from the tomb of Ty. In the latter, the preposition *hr* is omitted, but its reading may be implied from the former.

¹³⁵ Theoretically, the false door is linked to the burial chamber and to the serdab in which statues of the deceased are kept, but it does not physically lead into these spaces (see Bárta 2011: 249-51, Nyord 2013a: 198). I return to this idea in **Chapter 5**.

portico areas would provide visitors with a more easily accessible location in which to carry out rituals, and therefore allow the deceased to partake of offerings at a number of points in the tomb complex. As posited in the previous chapter (**Section 4.i**), the tomb owner could be presentified through imagery and texts on the tomb façade and in the outer areas of the tomb. However, the conceptualisation of the false door as a liminal point, as well as its physical affordances suggest that offering installations were the preferred location for the presentation and reception of offerings. False doors usually appear in combination with offering tables and benches, which have surfaces designed for the reception of physical offerings and ritual equipment. The idea that tangible offerings were preferable to those made through voice and gesture is also a factor, as mentioned in the discussion of appeal texts (**Section 4.ii**), while the ‘hierarchy’ of offerings will be elaborated on in **Section 7.iii**.



Like porticoes, courtyard areas can include an offering slab, statuary of the tomb owner, and/or a *Prunkscheintür*¹³⁶ above the point at which the corridor down to the burial chamber meets the courtyard¹³⁷ (Bárta 2005b: 108, 113). For example, a false door for Ty's eldest son, Demedj, is located in the south end of the west wall of Ty's pillared courtyard (Épron and

¹³⁶ The *Prunkscheintür* is a variant of a false door decorated in a palace façade style (Wiebach 1981: 45).

¹³⁷ The example that Bárta cites is from Giza (Seshemnefer IV).

Daumas 1939: pl. XX). In courtyard 1a of Merefnebef's complex (**Plan 5.1**), an uninscribed limestone false door is situated in a niche opposite the west chapel entrance (**Figure 5.19**). The date of this installation is uncertain, but it is probably a later addition to the complex (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 62).

Multiple false doors are attested in the same tomb, not only for family members of the tomb owner, but also for the tomb owner him/herself. Multiple doors for the same person exist even within the same room – the west chapel of Merefnebef incorporates two, each with its own offering table (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 61, 93-96, 160-62). Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep each have a false door in the main offering chapel, but also in their ante-chamber (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: 157-60). There are further false doors in the portico of their tomb, which is a more easily accessible area.

False doors do not appear in the outer areas of tombs solely due to space restrictions in the tomb interior, as they are found in larger as well as smaller tomb complexes. Additional false doors reiterate the need for participation from the living, especially when they appear in the outer areas of large tomb complexes, as this provides visitors with a more accessible option for providing offerings. An excellent illustrative example of the requirement for a usable offering point, and thus active participation, comes from the complex of Merefnebef.

Merefnebef's east chapel was added at some point after the mastaba's original construction, likely near the end of 6th Dynasty when the courtyard to the west part of the complex (and hence the main west chapel) became blocked by the collapse of a retaining wall (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 41, 248-49). It was apparently deemed necessary to construct a new offering installation in order to administer his cult and/or perhaps that of his son¹³⁸. The east chapel sits against a niche in the mastaba's eastern wall and is surrounded by the remains of mudbrick walls; whether the space was originally roofed is unclear (ibid. 59) (**Plan 5.1**). It contains a limestone false door and lintel dedicated to Merefnebef, and a limestone offering table with a *htp* motif¹³⁹ (ibid. 56-59). The chapel is poorly preserved, but the Polish-Egyptian team have produced an image of a possible reconstruction (**Figure 5.20**).

¹³⁸ One of Merefnebef's sons added decorative motifs pertaining to him and his wife to the west chapel (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 141).

¹³⁹ The offering table was found in roughly its original position; a fragment of the door was displaced in the north-east of the chapel; the lintel was discovered outside the chapel (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 56-59).

Image of chapel removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 5.20: Reconstruction of Merefnebef's east chapel.
Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 57, Drawing 1.

Although the west chapel was not cleared and re-opened, neither was it left to ‘magically provide’ for the deceased via its elaborate image and text decoration, its two false doors, two offering tables, and bench. The addition of the east chapel indicates that an alternative, accessible offering location was required so that the living could still actively participate in the offering cult: ‘magical’ offering provision was not relied upon.

False doors located in tomb porticoes could be used in the mortuary cult, but also during the funeral, as Chauvet argues (2011). Several tombs at Saqqara have porticoes, some of which include false doors¹⁴⁰. The double tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep is an interesting example: on the east wall of the portico are two painted *Prunkscheintüren*, and a carved outline of a false door with sunken decoration featuring Khnumhotep’s name and image in the aperture (ibid. 277-79, 299-300) (**Figure 5.15**). Chauvet posits that the outline of the false door is not just a *depiction*, but is a false door in its own right with its own texts and decoration; she suggests it is the end-point for the funeral procession (depicted on the same wall) and its attendant rituals (ibid. 277-78). However, I would argue that, in this particular case at least, the door does not afford all types of physical interaction from the living: although visitors could view it and perhaps offer verbally and gesturally at it, the image of

¹⁴⁰ See Chauvet 2011: 297-301 for examples of Old Kingdom Saqqara tombs with entrance porticoes.

the door is small, situated among other decoration, and located near the top of the wall. Further, there is no surface at its base for the placement of tangible offerings. Participants would need to progress further inside the tomb to offer physical and/or perishable items.

Table 5.1: Sizes of false door apertures versus entrance doors from the same tombs¹⁴¹

Tomb and publication	False door location	False door aperture size¹⁴²	Size of chapel entrance door¹⁴³
<i>Ankhmahor</i> Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 20, 23	Pillared hall (room VII ¹⁴⁴)	0.89m H x 0.14m W	2.27m H (highest preserved part) x 0.70m W
<i>Irukaptah</i> McFarlane 2000: 21-22	Chapel, west wall	0.90m H x 0.15m W	1.96m-2.00m H x 0.70m W
<i>Ihy/Idut</i> Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003: 37, 39-40	Chapel (room IX), west wall	1.75m H x 0.15m W	Wall height not preserved above 1.20m; 0.80m W
<i>Kaiemsenu</i> McFarlane 2003: 73	Room IA (offering chapel), unfinished door, west wall	0.70m H x 0.11m W	2.00m H x 0.60m W
	Room IA, west wall, southern door	1.33m H x 0.14m W	
	Room IA, west wall, northern door	0.99m H x 0.15m W	
<i>Merefnebef</i> Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 60, 93-94, 160	West chapel, west wall, northern end	1.09m H x 0.13m W	1.99m H x 0.61m W (entrance to west chapel)
	West chapel, west wall, southern end	0.87m H (width not stated, but narrower than northern false door aperture)	
	Court 1A	Not specified (entire	

¹⁴¹ Not all of the core tombs had preserved false doors and/or not all tomb publications recorded the aperture sizes of the false doors, so not all of the core tombs are represented in this table.

¹⁴² Heights exclude drum unless otherwise stated.

¹⁴³ See footnote above.

¹⁴⁴ Room IV was likely the offering chapel; Loret recorded a false door and L-shaped offering bench there, which Capart could not find during later investigations (see Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 20-21, citing Capart 1907: 45).

		door is 0.52m H x 0.36m W)	
<i>Mereruka</i> ¹⁴⁵ Kanawati et al. 2010: 35, 37-38	Room A8	1.80m H x 0.20m W	2.45m H x 0.80m W
	Room A11	1.84m H x 0.39m W; within this is depiction of wooden door, 1.60m H x 0.31m W	
<i>Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep</i> Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: 158, 171-73	Ante-chamber to main offering chapel	Two doors ¹⁴⁶ – inner jambs 0.44m H (inc. drums)	Measurements of two doors into offering chapel (separated by a central pillar) not specified in publication ¹⁴⁷
	Main offering chapel	Two doors – inner jambs 1.27m H (inc. drums)	
<i>Nyankhnefertem</i> Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 136, 166, 183	Chapel, west wall, northern side	1.04m H x 0.09m W	1.87m H (inc. threshold) x 0.54m W
	Chapel, west wall, southern side: two false doors	Apertures not specified, but inner jambs of both are 1.15m H from floor	
<i>Seankuipthah</i> Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: 43-44	Offering chapel (room I), west wall	0.78m H x 0.13m W	1.95m H x 0.60m W

Animal tethering points

The open space afforded by porticoes and courtyards might permit the slaughter and butchery of animals, the meat from which would be used for offerings. Features attested in these areas include water basins¹⁴⁸, as previously discussed, and ‘tethering points’ for animals, both of which might be useful in the preparation of meat offerings (Ikram 1995: 106).

Animal flesh is a key offering to the deceased: within Old Kingdom tomb complexes, offering lists commonly mention five pieces of meat and five varieties of poultry; models of meat or meat-shaped containers (sometimes with organic remains inside) are found in burial

¹⁴⁵ Excludes his son's false door in front of the mastaba (for which see Kanawati et al. 2010: 34-35 and pl. 4b).

¹⁴⁶ Two further false doors belonging to other family members are found in the ante-chamber; their sizes are very similar (Moussa and Altenmüller 1977: 157-60).

¹⁴⁷ Measurements of 1.80m H x 0.83m W x 0.67m D are reported by Thierry Benderitter at https://www.osirisnet.net/mastabas/niankhkhnum_khnumhotep/e_niankhkhnum_khnumhotep_04.htm [last accessed 29 November 2019].

¹⁴⁸ Ikram estimates that 1-2 litres of water would be required for animal slaughtering (more for pig slaughtering, or for processing) (1995: 106).

chambers or shafts; and organic animal remains are found in partially filled shafts and/or within tomb complexes – possibly as offerings (see for example Ikram 2006; 2011). From the Old Kingdom onwards, cattle butchery is one of the most common motifs in Egyptian art, occurring notably in tombs¹⁴⁹ (Ikram 1995: 41-42). Offering procession scenes feature many types of animals being led, carried, or herded, and scenes of piles of offerings include butchered animals and cuts of meat prepared for presentation to the deceased.

The evidence from Saqqara points to animal offerings being made both during and after the funeral. Ikram posits that the animal bones found in the complex of Merefnebef and of Nyankhnefertem could be post-funeral offerings (2011: 368-69). In Nyankhnefertem's chapel, patches of burning (30-35cm diameter) comprising ashes, charcoal, animal bones, and burnt plant remains were found on the chapel floor in front of the northern false door – the only one of three doors that was finished¹⁵⁰ (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 122, 219-20, 223). Similar patches of burning were found near the entrance to the chapel, in the shared courtyard (ibid.) Rzeuska notes that the composition of burnt remains found in Merefnebef's courtyard is very similar to the filling found in jars deposited in burial shaft 46 (Seshemnefer's complex) at West Saqqara and asserts that because the jars were deposited in a burial shaft, the fillings are the remnants of a burnt offering made at the time of the funeral (2006: 456-58, 480-82)¹⁵¹.

Leading on from evidence of burnt animal remains in courtyard locations, Ikram and Chauvet both suggest that entrance courtyards or porticoes would be suitable areas for animal dispatching and butchery (Chauvet 2011: 278-79; Ikram 1995: 84-86). Ikram draws attention to the difficulty that would be involved in bringing a large animal into the tomb chapel and slaughtering it there, and posits instead that animals might have been 'presented' as offerings inside before being taken back outside for dispatch (Ikram 1995: 84, and footnotes 1-2). Harpur is of the opinion that the slaughter of animals took place before the false door, even if butchery was performed elsewhere (1987: 57).

It is possible that animal slaughter and butchery took place in courtyard and portico areas, due not only to the abovementioned practical features and considerations, but also to the decorative motifs of slaughter and butchery occasionally found in these areas (for example in

¹⁴⁹ Butchery scenes in tombs may also have symbolic connotations (see Ikram 1995: 41-44).

¹⁵⁰ Rzeuska notes that these remains come from the earliest phase in the cemetery's use as indicated by associated pottery fragments, and suggests that offerings were starting to be made while the reliefs and imagery of this chapel were incomplete (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 122, 224).

¹⁵¹ Two samples of the filling were analysed and found to contain potsherds, burnt bone fragments, charcoal and relatively less burnt plant matter; sand and haematite (the source of the red colour) were also present, but not burnt, indicating that these were added after burning, perhaps to extinguish the fire as Rzeuska suggests (2006: 480, 482).

the joint tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep) (Chauvet 2011: 278-80). Harpur observes that these motifs are often found on entrance thicknesses in connection with depictions of statue processions, and suggests that animal offerings were made for the statue of the deceased before it was placed inside the tomb (1987: 57). Offering rituals could be performed in outer areas of the tomb complex and directed to the tomb owner(s) as suggested by the presence of additional features: niches designed to hold statues of the deceased; and slits that allowed a partial view into the serdab that again contained statuary (Chauvet 2011: 278-80). As mentioned above, false doors may also be a feature in the outer areas of tombs.

There is evidence to indicate that certain areas inside of the Saqqara tombs could have been used for tying up animals, potentially before slaughtering them. Particularly notable are so-called ‘tethering holes’, made through the corners of walls in liminal areas. However, I would argue that not all instances of these holes are necessarily animal tethering points, although they do afford the *passing through* of a cord (see **Table 5.2**, pp. 108-109 for examples of the holes’ diameters). Images including **Figure 5.23** suggest that tethering stones or rings were used, rather than cords passed through holes in the corners of walls. An alternative function of the holes might be for securing open door leaves with tie fastenings¹⁵², as **Table 5.2** shows that most examples are found in door thicknesses or recesses. However, this explanation would only fit with holes that are found both in door thicknesses and also high enough from the ground – tie fastenings, at least in New Kingdom temples, are located at approximately 1 metre above floor level¹⁵³. Only a few of the examples in **Table 5.2** could be construed in this way, although the heights for tomb door fastenings in the Old Kingdom might possibly have been different and less consistent than in later periods.

¹⁵² ‘Tie fastening’ was among the methods used in Ancient Egypt to fasten doors: a cord was attached to the door leaf and then passed through a diagonal hole between the face of the door jamb and the reveal, in order to secure the leaf (Accetta 2016: 50, citing Kuhlmann 1984: 660).

¹⁵³ K. A. Accetta, personal communication, 4 December 2017.



Figure 5.21: Stone tethering ring, tomb of Mereruka, room A13. Steps of offering table just visible (centre).
Source: Author's photograph.

In contrast, Mereruka's tomb complex features a stone ring not connected with a doorway. Instead, it is positioned on the floor between the central two pillars in room A13 (**Figure 5.21**)¹⁵⁴. This room also houses a statue of the tomb owner positioned above a raised offering table (Kanawati et al. 2010: 39). Another tethering stone is known from Senedjemib's complex at Giza, where it is fixed in the pavement between the courtyard, which features a large stone basin, and the east face of tomb G2370 (Brovarski 2000: 11). Brovarski also notes an instance from Ptahhotep I's mastaba (not found *in situ*), which is comparable to Mereruka's (ibid., citing Davies 1901: 4 and pl. 2).

Space restriction is a key consideration if leading an animal into and through a tomb complex, especially if that animal is to be slaughtered and/or butchered inside one of the chambers. As noted above, bringing a large animal to the ground in order to kill it would be difficult in a confined space. As Ikram highlights, a particular problem is posed in Mereruka's tomb by the proximity of the pillars to the tethering ring (**Figure 5.21**); yet the slaughter of smaller or younger animals here might be feasible (1995: 84, footnote 1).

¹⁵⁴ The tethering stone measures 0.49m N-S, 0.25m E-W, 0.36m high, and has a 0.15m diameter hole 0.13m from its top (Kanawati et al. 2010: 39).

Animals would be kept tied up while being fed or awaiting slaughter – depictions of tethered animals are common in tombs (ibid. 108). At Saqqara, an example of such a scene is found in Nikauisesi’s tomb, which depicts seated people putting something (perhaps food) into the mouths of young bovids¹⁵⁵ (**Figure 5.22**). In Ankhmahor’s tomb, a bovid is shown tied to a ring set directly into the floor (**Figure 5.23**).

<p>Image of bovids removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000.</p>
<p>Figure 5.22: Bovids tethered with rope to blocks on the floor (clearest example indicated in red). Tomb of Nikauisesi, room 1, south wall, above entrance. Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pl. 47, detail.</p>
<p>Image of bovids removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Kanawati and Hassan 1997.</p>
<p>Figure 5.23: Bovid tethered with rope to a ring set into the floor (indicated in red). Tomb of Ankhmahor, room IV, east wall. Source: Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pl. 49, detail.</p>

However, when the animals are depicted in the process of being slaughtered, they do not usually appear to be fixed to a tethering point, but instead have their limbs tied together, as illustrated by another scene from Nikauisesi’s tomb (**Figure 5.24**). Additionally, Ikram notes that Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom models depicting butchery activities do not include tethering stones or rings (1995: 86).

Perhaps the proximity of the majority of the holes to the floor does recall tethering stones and rings, which are placed on the ground, more readily than tie fastenings. However, as so few surviving door leaves are known (**Figure 5.12a** being an exception) it is difficult to ascertain whether and where cords were attached to them.

¹⁵⁵ The text labels above the bovids mean ‘young (animal)’ (Erman and Grapow 1971: Vol. II, 429).

Image of bovids removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000.

Figure 5.24: Butchery of bovids with limbs tied. Tomb of Nikauisesi, passageway extension between rooms 2 and 3, west wall.

Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pl. 57, detail.

Given the evidence discussed, it is impossible to establish unequivocally where animal slaughter and butchery took place in the vicinity of the tomb, if indeed it did. Outer areas of tombs appear to better afford animal-related activities, whereas the chambers inside often present space-related problems, even if tethering stones or rings are present. At least in smaller tombs, it seems more plausible that animals were presented in offering chapels, but slaughtered in an open area. Even though slaughtering and butchery scenes are commonly found in tombs, they cannot be taken at face value: these activities might not have taken place inside or even directly outside the tomb.

However, it is clear that meat was considered an important offering, with finds of animal remains at tomb sites attesting to the use of animals in activities involving burning and depositing. It is uncertain whether animal offerings were made as frequently as suggested by offering lists and formulae, or if they were mainly an ‘ideal’ reflected in imagery. As mentioned above, at least one animal-related ritual might have been carried out with statues of the deceased, possibly in courtyard and portico areas. The design and decoration of these areas, as well as their affordances, allude to the importance of statuary in the ritual environment of the tomb. The particular affordances of the statues in the Saqqara tombs will be discussed next.

Table 5.2: Examples from tomb selection of holes in door recesses and walls

Tomb and publication	Location in tomb	Dimensions	Height above floor
<i>Ankhhmahor</i> Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 23-24	Room III, west wall, cut through to room V doorway, south thickness	0.03m W x 0.06m H	0.63m above threshold
	Room I, south wall, through to room VII doorway, west thickness	0.04m diameter, plastered	0.20m (and 0.04m each side from the corner)
	Room VII, north-east corner of west engaged pillar ¹⁵⁶	Not specified in report	1.55m
<i>Ihy/Idut</i> ¹⁵⁷ Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003: 37-40	Entrance doorway to tomb, west wall of door recess, cut through to door recess in south wall of Room I	Cavity 0.24m square, internal dimensions 0.13m W x 0.18m H, 0.38m depth, connects with cavity 0.18m square, 0.30m deep in south wall of room I	0.63m (and 0.20m from corner of door recess)
<i>Mereruka</i> Kanawati et al. 2010: 35-36, 40-41	Room A1	Cut through west doorway recess to north wall: 0.05m diameter	0.30m (and 0.4m from corner)
	Room A4-A6	Cut through north doorway thickness of A4 into east wall of A6: 0.01m diameter	0.35m
	Room A17	Cut through south wall of doorway recess to east wall: 0.05m diameter	0.77m
	Room A18	Cut from south wall of door recess to east wall: 0.04m diameter	0.60m
	Room A19	Cut from south wall of door recess to east wall: 0.07m diameter	0.72m

¹⁵⁶ A number of other holes are found in room VII, but they do not pass through one side of the wall and out of the other (Kanawati and Hassan: 1997: 23). Therefore, these do not afford tethering.

¹⁵⁷ Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, in their 2003 publication of Ihy/Idut's tomb, change their classification (made in their 2000 publication of Nikauisesi's tomb) of some of the tethering holes to door bolt holes (2000: 26 and footnote 116; 2003: 37-40).

<i>Nikauisesi</i> Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 26-30	Room I, north wall, through to recessed entrance to room V	0.04m x 0.06m	0.07m (0.04m from the corner)
	Room II, south end of west wall, through to north thickness of doorway to room VII (court)	0.05m diameter	0.14m (and 0.05m from the corner)
	Room II, north wall, through to east thickness of door to passage	0.025m diameter	0.27m (and 0.03m from corner, 0.04m from east thickness)
	Room III, west wall, through to north thickness of door to room IV	0.07m W x 0.09m H (emerging as 0.09m diameter)	0.92m (and 0.03m from north edge of door)
	Room V, south wall, to west thickness of door to room I	0.05m W x 0.08m H	0.10m (and 0.04m from corner of door)
	Room V, west wall	Two holes each 0.04m W x 0.05m H, 0.05m apart, cut at an angle (0.08m depth) to join together	0.56m

Statuary

As Fitzenreiter concludes in his extensive study of the forms and uses of statuary in private Old Kingdom tombs, statues of the deceased are found in close connection with cult areas, implying that an image of the tomb owner was required at/near the place in which ritual interaction with the deceased would occur (2001: 529). The notion of presentification extends beyond the ‘depiction’ of the tomb owner that Fitzenreiter suggests¹⁵⁸, and holds that statues make the deceased manifest in the tomb space, and allow them to partake in the rituals and benefit from them, as the image is ontologically linked to the deceased¹⁵⁹.

I suggested above – regarding false doors with sculpted images of the deceased – that images in the round present an impression of corporeal presence. Further, images that could be viewed face-on, with both eyes depicted, afforded a reciprocal, visual connection between

¹⁵⁸ “...die Grabstatue nicht aus der Vorstellung des dauerhaft gemachten Körpers entwickelt hat, sondern aus der Vorstellung, dass der Tote am Ort einer ihn betreffenden Kulthandlung abgebildet werden soll” (Fitzenreiter 2001: 529).

¹⁵⁹ Fitzenreiter does accept that the deceased is an active participant in communications (i.e. with the living), despite being a depiction: “Das besondere der funerären Praxis – als Kommunikation betrachtet – ist, dass in der Statue eine Person abgebildet wird, deren aktive Teilnahme an der Kommunikation angenommen wird, diese in der Realität aber nur durch das Abbild realisiert ist” (2001: 532).

the living and the dead. Crucially, the synergy of physical affordances and presentification enables the living and the dead to interact in offering rituals, as will become evident.

At Saqqara¹⁶⁰, statues can be located in spaces closed to visitors, such as serdabs or burial chambers (i.e. fully or partially hidden), or open to visitors, such as offering chapels and porticoes (i.e. always on show). Statues may be freestanding or engaged, and located in niches and/or positioned alongside installations¹⁶¹.

Chauvet argues that the architectonic and decorative features of porticoes are engineered to direct visitors' attention and movement to key ritual areas (2011, *passim*). She highlights that serdab slits ('squints') are sometimes found in entrance porticoes (such as in the tomb of Ty), suggesting that visitors can thereby gain partial access to the deceased's image, which is contained in the serdab¹⁶², without having to enter further into the tomb in order to carry out ritual actions such as censuring or recitations (ibid. 279)¹⁶³.

Serdabs are a feature of many of the Saqqara tombs, including those of Mereruka, Irukthap, Ty, Nikauisesi, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, Kaiemheset, and Kaiemsenu. A serdab is an enclosed space that contains a statue of the deceased, and it may also contain statues of the deceased's family and/or dependents, so-called 'serving' statues and models, offering tables and basins, and various other types of objects, depending on the tomb owner's preferences and resources (see Lehmann 2000: 75-130).

Serdabs in the 5th and 6th Dynasties are often built behind one of the offering chapel walls, although during the 6th Dynasty at Saqqara and Giza they are increasingly located in shafts and burial chambers (ibid. 35-46). It must be noted that for those built above ground, not all have squints (ibid.) Where squints do exist, they likely functioned to connect the serdab to the offering room, allowing the statues in the serdab to be integrated into mortuary cult activities (ibid. 238). Additionally, as Chauvet suggests, squints connecting with the portico allow visitors easily accessible contact with statues of the deceased for ritual purposes. Bárta similarly suggests that statues of the tomb owner visible through squints, or in niches, permitted the deceased to partake in rituals (2005b: 108).

¹⁶⁰ Not all Old Kingdom tombs feature statues. However, the importance of including an image of the tomb owner is demonstrated by the slab stelae found on the fronts of Giza tombs (which were not internally decorated), and by similar slabs located within false doors of less elaborate tombs than those in my selection – these stelae and slabs usually depict the tomb owner seated at the offering table.

¹⁶¹ See Fitzenreiter 2001 for an extensive study of statues in non-royal Old Kingdom tombs, including their types, chronological development, role in funerary practices, and depiction in tomb wall scenes.

¹⁶² But cf. Beaux for a converse interpretation: "These [portico] scenes were always in connection with the statues of the deceased who could, from inside their serdabs and through openings at the level of their eyes, see and enjoy forever the bringing of various offerings" (2011: 231). Neither Chauvet nor Beaux stress the reciprocity of sight between the living and images of the deceased.

¹⁶³ See Chauvet 2007a: 48-50 for a discussion of Ty's serdab squints.

For the tombs among my selection that feature serdabs, the heights of squints are not always recorded, and where the wall between the serdab and the adjoining room(s) is not preserved, it cannot be ascertained whether squints existed¹⁶⁴. See **Table 5.3** (pp. 119-20) for examples of recorded squint heights; it is difficult to ascertain whether visitors would have been able to see any statuary contained inside without the original statues *in situ*. Although many serdabs and their contents were not found intact, three of the serdabs from the tombs (Kaiemheset, Mereruka, and Ty) did contain statues or their remains. Additionally, three statues found in Anonymous Tomb I likely originate from Kaiemsenu's serdab; two now survive, one male standing statue and one male seated statue (heights from bases 1.07m and 0.58m, respectively) (McFarlane 2003: 87-89, pls. 33b-35). If these statues were from Kaiemsenu's serdab, they might have been semi-visible to visitors. The serdab squint, located in room IA, is 1.31m above the floor; but the floor of the serdab, on which the statues would stand, is approximately 0.5m higher than that of room IA (see **Table 5.3**), boosting the heights of the statues to 1.57m and 1.1m, respectively.

Image of tomb complex removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright McFarlane 2003.

Plan 5.2: Detail of Kaiemheset's complex with installations indicated in red. Phase one construction, rooms IA, IB; phase two, rooms IC, ID; phase three, IE. Extension to the north for other family members not shown.
Source: Adapted from McFarlane 2003: pl. 40.

¹⁶⁴ This is the case for Irukhaptah (McFarlane 2000: 22) and Nikauisesi (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 29).

Inside one of Kaiemheset's two serdabs (room ID) (**Plan 5.2**)¹⁶⁵, the original excavators found the remains of the base of a wooden statue¹⁶⁶ inscribed with his name (ibid. 27, pls. 16a, 51a; Quibell and Hayter 1927: pl. 27:3). However, the height that statue would have been is unknown and cannot be compared with that of the serdab squint. The same is true of the statue in Mereruka's serdab (room A7), in which the foot of a wooden statue was reportedly found, although it had been robbed in antiquity (Daressy 1898: 535; Kanawati et al. 2010: 36, footnote 329).

The tomb of Ty also has two serdabs, and a limestone statue of him was found in situ in the serdab built behind the south wall of his offering chapel (room VI)¹⁶⁷. Scremin argues that Ty's statue would have been visible to visitors through the squint, especially as there was originally a window in the east wall (above and to the left of the squints) to let in natural light in the east wall, near to the squints (2018: 26; Wild 1953: pl. CXXXII). He demonstrates that Ty's statue was crafted deliberately with the heights of the squints in mind, so that visitors could see it when entering from the outermost corridor (ibid. 27 and 30-31, figs. 6-9). It remains possible that serdab statues in tombs would have been (partially) visible to visitors, although the lack of *in situ* statues is problematic, and light sources would be required.

A number of my selected Saqqara tombs feature niches that might have originally contained statues, allowing images in the round to be on show continuously. In the north wall of Kaiemheset's chapel (room IA), there is a niche that possibly held a statue¹⁶⁸; the niche has a mudbrick bench in front of it, and the surfaces of both the niche and bench were found to be "whitewashed" (McFarlane 2003: 25) (for the significance of white coating in cult areas, see **Section 8.iii**). McFarlane suggests that the niche might have contained a limestone group statue (**Figure 5.25**), which Firth claims was discovered in the chapel itself (ibid.)¹⁶⁹ The sill of the niche is 0.80m above the floor, while the statue is 0.50m high¹⁷⁰, so visitors could

¹⁶⁵ Kaiemheset's chapel (room IA) and serdab (IB) were built during the first phase of construction; the second serdab (ID) during the second phase (see McFarlane 2003: 23-29).

¹⁶⁶ Statue JE44137.

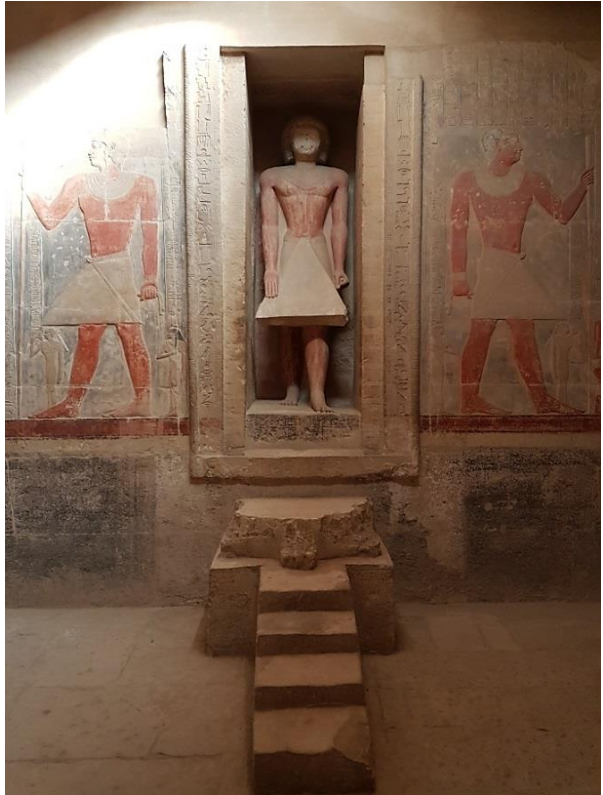
¹⁶⁷ As Scremin points out, there is no evidence that 20 statues were originally located here, as Mariette claimed; yet there might have originally been three statues – one for each serdab squint (2018: 23, 27). The statue found *in situ* is now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE10065/CG20).

¹⁶⁸ Niche is 0.8m above floor, 0.90m wide, 1.00m deep; ledge of niche is 0.15m high, 0.15m deep; bench is 0.90m wide, 0.55m deep, 0.30m high (McFarlane 2003: 25). The recess in the west wall of the chapel might have held one or two stelae or wooden false doors, as suggested by the *tafla* brick backing (ibid. 25-26, and see footnotes 77-81).

¹⁶⁹ Contra Quibell, who states that it was found in the pillared hall (McFarlane 2003: 25; Quibell and Hayter 1927: 18, 43).

¹⁷⁰ This measurement is taken from the records held for object JE44173 (Egyptian Museum, Cairo): <http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/record.aspx?id=15266> [last accessed 29 November 2019].

view it easily if it were placed on the sill. The niche is located on the opposite wall to one of his serdabs (room IB), and a basin is also located in this room (discussed above). Therefore, a combination of features for offering activity are present in this chapel: the deceased is made present, alongside members of his family, through statuary, both partially visible (in the serdab, which Quibell and Hayter report as having a squint (1927: 19)) and always on show (in the niche); and, as discussed above, there is a basin in the room (discussed above), and a false door originally situated on the west wall.

<p>Image of statue removed for copyright reasons. Copyright www.globalegyptianmuseum.org / CULTNAT.</p>	
<p>Figure 5.25: Statue of Kaiemheset, his wife, and son. Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE44173). Source: www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/record.aspx?id=15266</p>	<p>Figure 5.26: Statue of Mereruka above a raised offering table. Tomb of Mereruka, room A13. Source: Author's photograph.</p>

In Irukhaptah's chapel, there is a recess (1.90m wide, 0.55m deep) in the west wall next to the false door (McFarlane 2000: 22). Entrance corridors and ante-chambers are possible locations for statues: the southern end of the entrance corridor of the dual complex of Akhethotep and Ptahhotep terminates in a niche, and there is a shelved recess in the ante-chamber to Ptahhotep's chapel (Davies 1900: 4, pl. 1; 1901: 4-5). As with statues in courtyards and porticoes, those in entrance corridors and ante-chambers would afford ritual action to be carried out in more peripheral areas of a tomb complex, but also serve to presentify the tomb owner and/or members of their family. However, as with images of the tomb owner on tomb façades, it may have been preferable for statues to be accompanied by

other installations (false doors, offering tables, basins) if they were to be involved in ritual action. Fitzenreiter suggests that a statue of the deceased without accompanying features may be interpreted as representing him/her not as an entity ‘fixed’ in the tomb (to receive offerings), but as one that could leave the tomb (to fulfil other types of actions) (2001: 259).

Image of tomb complex removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Roman Eisele.

Plan 5.3: Mereruka’s tomb complex. Only rooms prefixed ‘A’ belong to Mereruka (red lines indicate subterranean burial chamber locations).

Source: Adapted from plan by Roman Eisele, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12915877>, created from plans in tomb publications (for which see **Section 2.ii**).

The tombs of Mereruka and Irukhaptah provide differing examples of statuary placed in niches: in the first, the statuary would be visible on occasion; in the second, continuously. In Mereruka’s complex (**Plan 5.3**), there is a limestone statue of the tomb owner as tall as the niche in which it is set (niche internal height 2.40m; 0.80m above the floor) (Kanawati et al. 2010: 39). A raised limestone platform (0.48m high) with four steps leading up to it is situated in front of the niche and surmounted by a *hṯp* offering table (0.13m high) (ibid.)

(**Figure 5.26**). As the statue is raised off the ground and over two metres tall, the steps allow cult participants to directly approach the statue, to access it from a closer proximity, perhaps for ritual purposes. The offering table, while at the top of the steps, is low enough to be reached without using them. The table could also be approached from either side, but it seems likely that visitors were to approach the table from the front – the same way in which a false door is approached (see **Plan 5.3**).

Kanawati et al. compare Mereruka's statue niche with depictions of statue shrines in Old Kingdom wall scenes and suggest that it originally had wooden doors, as evidenced by round depressions for pivots cut into the sill of the niche, as well as a surmount of a lintel and torus moulding beneath a cavetto cornice (ibid.) Indeed, depictions of statues of the deceased inside shrines appear in tomb decorative scenes (Eaton-Krauss 1984: 69-70). Wiebach posits that the false door eventually takes over the function of the statue shrine and therefore that sculpted images of the tomb owner appear on the false door (1981: 142-44) (see for example **Figure 5.16** above). Wiebach argues that although Mereruka's statue can be interpreted as a statue in a niche, the installation is based on the concept of the false door into which an image in the round has been inserted¹⁷¹ (ibid. 145).

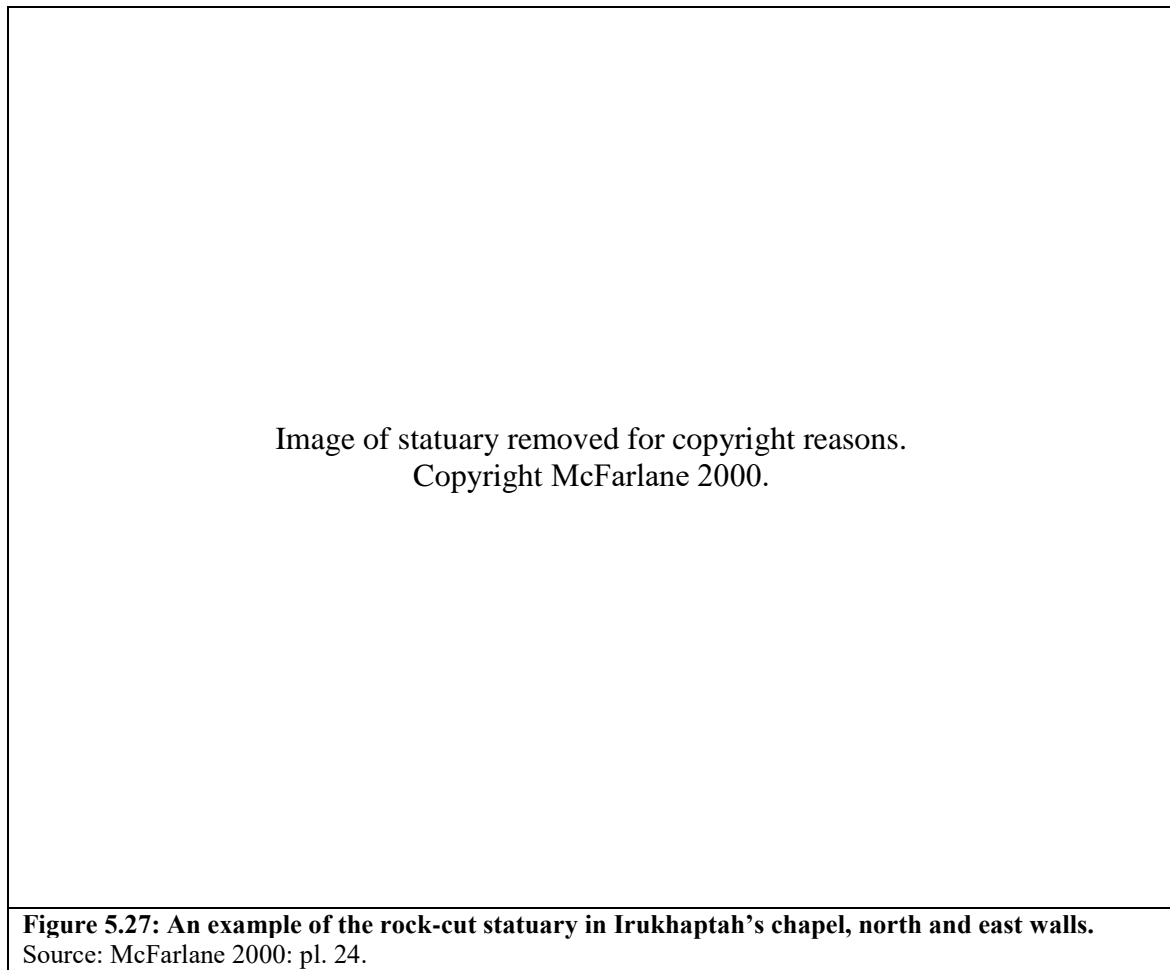
Mereruka's complex is elaborate and there are two false doors in addition to the statue: one in the west wall of room A8, and another in the west wall of room A11, beneath which the burial shaft is located. The statue in room A13 is situated in the north wall (rather than west wall), but its position opposite the entrance from room A11 allows for the statue and offering table to be approached in a direct line (**Plan 5.3**). Room A13 is at the back of the complex and a visitor would need to walk through either A8 or A11 in order to access it, i.e. through a room containing a false door.

I agree with Wiebach's observation that there is an apparent disconnect between the statue shrine versus the false door decorated as a shrine façade in one respect: whereas a shrine with doors can shield the image from the viewer, statuary on false doors is always on show to visitors (1981: 145-46). Mereruka's statue niche with doors is reminiscent of the examples of false doors decorated as if they have double door leaves. In the case of statues in niches, the image of the deceased may be physically revealed when in ritual use, or hidden when not. It is also reminiscent of the abovementioned doors found by Junker in Giza, which he reconstructs as originating from the south wall of the serdab, and which Kanawati suggests were associated with the eight statue compartments in the room (Junker 1938; Kanawati

¹⁷¹ Wiebach elaborates that during the course of the 6th Dynasty, false door design moved increasingly away from a typical form; Mereruka's statue is one example of a variation (1981: 145).

2002: 55-56). In the case of statues in serdabs with associated false doors, the images may be partially visible through serdab squints with a sufficient light source, yet perhaps the images are not ‘active’ unless the false doors are being used as the focus of ritual activity. In any event, the potential for visibility and invisibility emerges as an important factor – doors act as devices to afford this, being physically and/or ritually openable.

That said, statues of the tomb owner are not always found in shrines, behind doors, or in direct association with false doors. Irukhaptah’s one-room chapel, lined with rock-carved images in niches, provides an instance of statuary being constantly on show (**Figure 5.27**).



There are 14 statues, in varying stages of completion, situated in niches: two on the north wall, eight on the east wall, and four on the west wall (McFarlane 2000: 60). Those on the west wall are the full height of the wall (average statue height 1.62m, niches 0.45m above ground), whereas those on the east and north walls are situated below a band of decoration (see below) and are therefore shorter (average statue height 1.35m, niches 0.25m above ground) (ibid. 22, 60).

Of the statues on the north and east walls, nine of the ten are of Irukhaptah; the tenth is unfinished. Of the remaining four on the west wall, three are male and one is female

(identities unknown) (ibid. 61-70). Two extra statues are drafted on the east wall and three more on the west wall (ibid. 60). Therefore, some of the statues were likely depicting – or presentifying – people other than Irukthapah. Nevertheless, Irukthapah’s image and name are repeated many times, creating a sense of what I term here ‘hyper-representation’,¹⁷².

The piers that separate the statues on the north wall are all, save one, inscribed with Irukthapah’s name and titles; the decorated area running along the top of the north and east walls above the statues contains the *hṯp-di-niṣwt* formula (ibid. 56, 61, pls. 41, 44, and 45) (**Figure 5.27**).

Irukthapah’s corridor-like chapel is oriented N-S with a width of 2.15-2.25m (ibid. 21). The narrow space, the lack of offering tables in front of the statues, and the sheer number of statues makes it unlikely that offerings were placed directly before them all. However, the heights of the statues afford near eye-level viewing of the images for visitors to the tomb¹⁷³. Although the decoration of the chapel and its false door is incomplete, there is no sign that the south (back) wall was to be carved with any further statues (ibid. 22). It appears that all the statues would have to be passed in order to arrive at the false door, which appears to be the ritual focal point, located near the back of the chapel¹⁷⁴ (west wall, southern end). This stands in contrast to Mereruka’s statue, which itself appears to be a focal point for ritual activity: as discussed, it is located at the back of the complex, is approachable in a straight line, and has a raised offering table accessible via stairs.

The affordances of installations that accompany statuary point to the performance of ritual actions associated with images in the round. Combinations of statues with other offering installations are found outside of my core group of tombs, such as at Giza in the tomb of Akhmerutnisut (**Figure 5.28**). Again, an offering table appears here in conjunction with a statue of the tomb owner; although in this instance the statue is seated, the offering table has an inset basin (originally three)¹⁷⁵, and a false door is also present. The actions that these

¹⁷² Fitzenreiter links multiple representations of the deceased in one place to the Egyptian conceptualisation of what he terms ‘completeness’ and ‘multiplicity of aspects’ (“Vollständigkeit” and “Vielheit der Aspekte”), which he says are also evident in Egyptian written language (dual and plural forms) (2001: 530).

¹⁷³ The recently discovered 5th Dynasty Saqqara rock-cut tomb of Wahty contains a very large number of engaged statues (reportedly 44 or 45) inside the one-room chapel and a smaller number of statues outside its entrance. It is not yet published, but photographs released by the media show that the statues vary considerably in height and scale – see for example <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-46580264> and <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2018/12/relief-statues-discovered-priest-royal-purification-tomb-saqqara-pyramid-egypt/> [retrieved 15 and 17 December 2018, respectively]. Therefore, not all of them would afford eye-level viewing for visitors.

¹⁷⁴ However, the *hṯp-di-niṣwt* formula is oriented as to be read starting from the southern end of the east wall and finishing on the north wall, i.e in the direction of the chapel’s exit.

¹⁷⁵ The limestone offering table would have had three inset alabaster basins originally, but two were removed in antiquity. The object is mentioned in Chapter 9 of Reisner’s unpublished 1942 manuscript (1942: 78). The

various elements afford (pouring, placing, presentifying, reciprocal sight) and their appearance alongside one another point to their being used together in offering activity.

<p>Image of statue, offering basin, and false door removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Giza Project at Harvard University.</p>	<p>Image of censuring removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2000.</p>
<p>Figure 5.28: Niche containing statue, offering basin, and false door. Chapel of Akhmerutnisut (tomb G2184, cemetery G2100). Source: Harvard Digital Giza Project. http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/photos/29142/full/</p>	<p>Figure 5.29: Censing scene (second register from bottom). Chapel of Irukhaptah, east wall, north end. Statue in niche (right) not drawn. Source: McFarlane 2000: pl. 44, detail.</p>

This is reinforced by tomb scenes that depict rituals being carried out on or for statues. For example, the burning of incense and offerings being presented before statues are among the themes found in tomb wall decoration (Eaton-Krauss 1984: 70-75). In Irukhaptah's chapel, a scene of censing appears next to one of the rock-cut figures (**Figure 5.29**) – the action is being directed to the statue itself, rather than to an image of a statue (McFarlane 2000: 30). Depictions of priests censing are also found on either side of the easternmost serdab squint in Ty's offering chapel – the figures face the opening, as if censing to the statue(s) inside.

In her study of representations of statues in Old Kingdom tombs¹⁷⁶, Eaton-Krauss concludes that once a statue had been manufactured and had undergone the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony, it assumed the identity of the tomb owner; it could therefore replace the mummy or coffin during episodes in the funeral, and receive offerings in the subsequent cult (ibid. 75-76). Ritual actions involving images of the deceased are a vital element in manifesting

original paper documents for this chapter are in archival boxes K01-02, Egyptian section, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; also accessible online via the Harvard Digital Giza Project.

¹⁷⁶ Statues may also be depicted in scenes on tomb walls. For a catalogue of Old Kingdom examples, see Eaton-Krauss 1984: 107-187. Among my selected tombs, examples are found in the tombs of Ankhmahor, Ihy/Idut, Merefnebef, Mereruka, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, and Ty.

their presence, and then in providing sustenance for them. The corporeality of a statue or deeply modelled relief adds to the impression of the presence of the deceased, as does the direct gaze of both eyes, which are visible in a face-on depiction¹⁷⁷.

As discussed above, corporeal imagery of the deceased might be on display constantly in the form of a statue in a niche – sometimes to the point of hyper-representation – or might be concealed or revealed via doors. Blending these possibilities, serdabs with squints might be said to afford *partial yet constant* sight of images, in that the image could be viewed at any time, assuming a sufficient light source and access to a serdab squint. A partially obscured view, due to poor lighting conditions or the position of a squint high off the ground (as in room IC of Kaimeheset’s tomb, see **Table 5.3** below), might add to the tension between visibility and invisibility, and the half-perceived presence of the tomb owner (Nyord 2013a: 198-200). Even in the case of sealed up serdabs, visitors familiar with tomb design and layout might well be aware of the inclusion of these, and hence of the deceased’s presence in statue form (Fitzenreiter 2001: 529). As will be discussed in **Chapter 6**, even the absence of an image of the tomb owner can imply his presence when the wider contexts and accompanying motifs present the impression that the deceased ‘should’ be there.

Table 5.3: Examples from tomb selection of serdab squint heights

Tomb and publication	Location of squint	Squint height
<i>Kaiemheset</i> McFarlane 2003: 26-27	Offering chapel (room IA), south wall, opens into serdab (room IB – stage 1 of construction)	Unknown (wall not preserved above 1.35m height), but Quibell and Hayter reported a squint (1927: 19)
	Pillared hall (room IC), south wall, opens into serdab (room ID – stage 2 of construction)	2.55m above floor of room IC (1.20m above sill of a recess, itself 1.35m above floor); 1.20m above likely original floor level of serdab, which is higher than floor of IC
<i>Kaiemsenu</i> McFarlane 2003: 73	Offering chapel (room IA), west wall, opens into serdab (room IB)	1.31m above floor of room IA; 0.80m above floor of serdab, which is higher than floor of IA
<i>Mereruka</i> Kanawati et al. 2010: 36	Room A6, centre of west wall, opens into room A7 (serdab)	1.35m above floor

¹⁷⁷ Additionally, statues often include the name and titles of the person depicted (see Fitzenreiter 2001: 542-43). This aids in the identification and manifestation of the individual.

<i>Seankhuptah</i> Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: 43-44	Upper part of niche in east external wall, opens into room III (serdab)	Not specified
	Room I (offering chapel), north wall, also opens into room III (serdab)	1.10m above offering table (NB: squint filled in during modern restoration)
<i>Ty</i> Steindorff 1913: Blatt 6, 20	Room VI (offering chapel), three openings	Not specified; but Steindorff reports the total preserved height of the wall as 4.65m, with the base of the squints marked at c. one third of the way up (i.e. 1.55m) (1913: Blatt 20)
	Between rooms I (portico) and II (pillared hall); one opening into each	Not specified; but Steindorff reports the preserved height of the north wall in the pillared hall as 2.04m up to the top of the squint here; and pl. 4 reports the preserved height of the east wall of the portico to be 2.70m, with the base of the squint marked at c. one half of the way up (i.e. 1.35m) (1913: Blatt 6)

5.iii. Conclusion

An examination of the physical affordances of the offering installations reveals that the designs of offering installations were deliberately tailored towards actions to be carried out by tomb visitors or cult participants. Further, the living were in some cases able to ritually control the concealing and revealing of the deceased's image, as demonstrated through visual motifs alluding to the affordances of opening and closing, and evidence of operable doors having been attached to statue niches. Although the diminutive size of their apertures reinforces that they were not for the living's use, false doors were perhaps thought to afford the passage of the deceased's *ka*, thus being 'ritually' operative. The manifestation of the deceased was vital so that he/she could benefit from the offering activity carried out, and face-on images of the tomb owner afforded a reciprocal gaze to be shared with the living – a performative act of relationship between the two parties.

Basins and offering tables permit the placement of liquid and solid offerings, with wear on some offering table surfaces attesting to their repeated use. Benches adjoining offering tables provide a convenient surface for placing offerings or ritual equipment. The proximity of

basins and tables to false doors and statues further supports their use in offering activity. Basins afford the containment of water for purification or libations, or possibly for cleaning areas subsequent to animal slaughter and butchery, if located in spaces that would accommodate the manoeuvring of animals. Potential animal tethering points are located inside offering chapels, but, given space restrictions, it is more likely that animals were tied up in these areas and ‘presented’ to the deceased.

The conjunction of statuary with false doors, offering tables, and basins underscores the significance of a material manifestation of the deceased’s presence for offering activity – this extends to half-perceived or semi-visible statues inside serdabs. Multiple statues of the tomb owner could even be employed, creating ‘hyper-representation’ in some instances. Statues could be raised off the ground and approached via steps, prompting a particular direction of movement and allowing a cult participant closer access to the images. Imagery was vital in presentifying the deceased, not only affording a visual connection between the living and the dead, but also physical interaction if not sealed in the serdab.

The location of false doors and offering tables in courtyards and porticoes points to these areas being used for offering activity. In one case (Merefnebef), installations in the façade and courtyard were created to provide offering points after the main chapel had become inaccessible, illustrating the importance of physical offering activity by the living.

Chapter 6. Guiding the movement and actions of cult participants inside the tomb

As illustrated in the foregoing chapters, participation from the living in the mortuary cult was encouraged and facilitated through text and image elements on the façade and portico areas, as well as via the physical properties and action potential of installations designed for ritual activity. Offering installations did not feature in the outer, more accessible areas of all tombs; in these cases, visitors would need to enter to the tomb in order to offer to the deceased, particularly if they were presenting tangible and/or perishable goods, which would be placed on an offering table in close proximity to an image of the deceased and/or a false door.

This chapter examines notable ways in which 2D and relief images on tomb walls guide visitors, should they proceed into the tomb. I focus on two functions of images. Firstly, ‘movement guiding’, which comprises figures of offering bearers and cult participants being oriented toward the location of the offering point(s) inside the tomb, as well as toward larger-scale images of the tomb owner – the idea of movement is reinforced through visual devices that give an impression of motion to the viewer. Secondly, ‘action guiding’, which comprises scenes that imply a need for viewer participation to ‘complete’ them, as well as the repetition of key offering-related motifs, which reinforce the nature of the space and the actions that should be carried out there. The conscious design and deployment of these visual features supports the hypothesis that active participation by the living in the tomb was perceived as crucial for the sustenance of the deceased.

I will not provide an in-depth study of *all* offering-related decoration in the tombs, due not only to the limits of this study in relation to the frequency of imagery in the tombs (notably, Mereruka’s complex has over twenty rooms, excluding additions made for family members), but also to the prevalence of common motifs among the tombs (thus it is unnecessary to list all examples). The discussion is not concerned with the images in relation to chronological developments, regional differences, or tomb types – Harpur covers these topics extensively (1987)¹⁷⁸. Its focus is the imagery and texts on, and surrounding, offering installations, examining the roles that they might play in shaping visitors’ movements and actions.

¹⁷⁸ Although few fundamental changes occurred to the architecture of the tomb entrance and the orientation of its decoration during the Old Kingdom, there is variation in the orientation of decoration inside the tomb due to the positioning of architectural features, chapel type, site topography, and personal choice, among other factors (Harpur 1987: 59, 123). Harpur provides an in-depth study of the orientation and content of tomb decoration during the Old Kingdom at a range of sites, while Roeten (2014) addresses chronological change in the decoration of Old Kingdom Giza tombs in relation to the provision of offerings.

6.i. Guiding functions: terminology and clarification

In **Section 4.i**, I utilised terms employed by Roeten to describe the functions that images on tomb façades fulfilled: ‘signalling’ and ‘inviting’ (see 2014: xvi, 242, 258-60, 349-50). These terms have proved useful to describe the roles of images, yet they do not define how the images succeeded in playing such roles. The decoration on the façades of my selected tombs is less complex and plentiful than on the interior walls, and upon examining the latter, it becomes evident that a deeper consideration of the way in which the images may be functioning in respect of visitors is required.

Although Roeten asserts that the figures on the western walls of Giza tombs are not employed in order to focus the attention of the visitor on the false door, he seems to base this conclusion only on whether images of the tomb owner are facing towards, or away from, the false door (2011: 14-15; 2014: 21-22). He does not consider the direction of cult participants and offering bearer figures. As these images pertain to the transportation and presentation of offerings to the deceased, they are highly relevant to the visitor, whose ideal role is that of cult participant. Moreover, I will demonstrate in this chapter that such figures are an intentional aspect of tomb design employed to direct visitors’ movement towards offering points and to prompt them to carry out cult actions there.

Roeten neither explicates what his ‘guiding function’ is contingent upon – the subject matter being depicted, where it is found, its orientation, and so on – nor how it might operate on the viewer. In order to avoid potential misinterpretation and misapplication of Roeten’s term, I define ‘guiding’ as the ability of depicted human figures to indicate the direction in which the audience viewing them should travel (movement guiding) and/or to indicate the types of actions that viewers should carry out (action guiding).

For the purposes of this study, the human figures are offering bearers and cult participants, and the audience comprises tomb visitors (who are potential cult participants). For ‘movement guiding’ to occur, the direction that the figures appear to be travelling in – their orientation – is towards the offering points in the tomb superstructure, whether they are in the same room in which the figures are depicted, or in another room towards which the figures are directed. In addition to these figures being directed toward the offering points, they are also facing images of the tomb owner, who appears on a larger scale. This reinforces the message that it is the deceased to whom the goods are being transported and presented.

It is important to note that by ‘orientation’, I am referring here to the direction in which the figures are ‘travelling’, not to cardinal direction. Although a row of cult participants may be

depicted with diversity in the attitudes of their arms and heads, there is usually a clear overall direction that the group appears to be heading in, often indicated by the direction of their feet. The depiction of possible directions is limited by the flat plane, since I am examining depictions on walls, and to the principles of Egyptian art.

‘Action guiding’ is a term not used by Roeten, but I employ it to denote another function that images of cult participants and offering bearers appear to have: to illustrate to visitors that offering actions are to be carried out in the tomb. The aim in this section is not to provide a catalogue of types of actions that are depicted, but to consider the devices through which images are deployed to prompt visitors to act.

6.ii. Internal tomb imagery: movement guiding

This section predominantly concerns the orientation of offering bearer and cult participant figures in internal tomb decoration, and examines the way in which they guide visitors to the room(s) in the tomb that feature offering installations and, within those rooms themselves, toward the location of the false door and/or offering table. It also considers another way in which movement is conveyed to viewers. I suggest that the figures, in some cases, exhibit breakages in symmetry.

Symmetry as a framing device was introduced in **Section 4.i** and the topic is addressed further in **Chapter 7**. It is pertinent to introduce and examine a particular aspect of framing here – broken symmetry (also called ‘dynamic balance’) – as it pertains to visitors’ movement within the tomb¹⁷⁹. Sets of images that are arranged symmetrically to create frames in the decorative programmes are rarely completely identical. Minor variations in the figures or objects depicted on either side of the ‘frame’ create breakages in symmetry. This ‘broken symmetry’ imparts a sense of motion to the viewer: since the symmetry is disrupted, a perceptual sense of imbalance is created, drawing the eye quickly across and around the scene, and eventually guiding it toward the salient feature being framed (see further Cutting 2002: 1170-73). It is possible that this impression of motion gained from images might even (indirectly) prompt visitors to move toward the highlighted feature.

The biological mechanisms through which static images impress a sense of motion upon a viewer (termed ‘implied motion’) have been researched within the field of cognitive neuroscience. Studies demonstrate that when people view static photographs showing implied motion, the same direction-selective neurons that are involved in the perception of real motion are activated (Kourtzi and Kanwisher 2000; Pavan et al. 2011). Put simply, when

¹⁷⁹ Van Leeuwen details different effects and degrees of framing (2005: 6-25).

humans view static images that imply motion, the same parts of our brain are stimulated as when viewing actual motion. Further, the brain seems to extract motion information not just from photographs or film frames, but also from pictorial representations, whether or not they contain human figures (Cutting 2002: 1165, footnote 1; Cattaneo et al. 2017).

While there are many methodological avenues through which art and its forms, production, and reception can be studied, it is through perceptual and cognitive systems that humans experience it (De Smedt and De Cruz 2010: 697). Understanding the underlying neurological reasons for our perception of a visual phenomenon (here, implied motion) is a helpful point of departure when investigating what effect it might have on the viewer, and why¹⁸⁰. My study places the examples of implied motion in their ritual and social context, i.e. how they are deployed to prompt desired actions from the living regarding the cult.

I examine examples of one particular device through which motion is implied in Egyptian art: that of ‘broken symmetry’. This term is drawn from the typology of depicted motions in static images proposed by Cutting (2002). While he focuses on how illustrations depict movement in contemporary science and art publications, some of his terminology is useful for describing the phenomena in Egyptian imagery. Cutting summarises five ‘solutions’ for representing motion: photographic blur; multiple stroboscopic images; broken symmetry; forward lean; and image and action lines¹⁸¹ (ibid. 1169).

Only two of these ‘solutions’ feature in Egyptian art. Forward lean describes the depiction of an object or figure leaning towards its direction of movement and while this is occasionally exhibited by figures of offering bearers and cult participants, it is only when they are presenting goods to the tomb owner, rather than when ‘travelling’ to offering points in the tomb – hence I do not focus on this here. Much more commonly featured is broken symmetry, which Cutting states as comprising asymmetry¹⁸², breakages or changes in a pattern, and *contrapposto*¹⁸³ in human figures (ibid. 1170-73). As the *contrapposto* stance is not found in Egyptian art, I consider only the first two types of broken symmetry.

¹⁸⁰ De Smedt and De Cruz stress that approaches to the study of art adopted from the humanities can be used in tandem with cognitive neuroscience to address both biological and cultural aspects of it (2010: 713-14).

¹⁸¹ Photographic blur is created through long exposure photography and captures movement in a less defined way; multiple stroboscopic images show a series of successive movements through time, such as seen in the work of Futurist artists; image and action lines are, for example, lines, dots, or arches drawn to indicate the pattern of a figure’s movement (such as in cartoons), or the pattern of lines created by a series of successive movements captured in photography via long exposure (such as the waving of a sparkler) without distorting the image of the object or figure (see Cutting 2002).

¹⁸² Symmetry and asymmetry are significant in Egyptian visual culture, as mentioned in **Section 4.i**, and are further discussed in **Chapter 7** with reference to communicative modes.

¹⁸³ A human figure in *contrapposto* rests their weight on one leg, with the angle of the shoulders leaning the opposite way to that of the hips (therefore asymmetrical).

There are additional features, not mentioned by Cutting, that contribute to viewers' comprehension of the figures' attitudes and movement patterns. De Smedt and De Cruz observe that humans have a perceptual preference for clear-cut shapes – strong lines, coupled with an absence of (depicted) shadows, allow for a clear depiction of stance or attitude and can help to imply motion in a static image (De Smedt and De Cruz 2010: 712, citing Cavanagh 2005). These are features of Egyptian 2D and relief imagery, so are seen in the images of offering bearers and cult participants.

In the following examination of the orientation of such figures, I will highlight illustrative examples of broken symmetry from among the rooms of the tombs under analysis.

Illustrative examples

Below I study four Saqqara tombs in respect of the 'movement guiding' function exhibited by images of cult participants and offering bearers, including examples of broken symmetry. I also analyse the orientation of the figures in relation to the overall layout of the tomb and its constituent rooms.

When visiting the tombs at Saqqara, I observed that the figures of offering bearers and cult participants on the walls of the superstructure were frequently oriented towards the main offering chapel (if a tomb had more than one room) and in the direction of the tomb owner's false door¹⁸⁴. The figures appeared to imply movement towards the offering points and helped to direct me towards those locations. As my study is not quantitative, I do not provide statistics on the orientation of these figures relative to the offering points in all Saqqara tombs, but I do include plans of selected tombs to illustrate that the offering bearer and cult participant figures are oriented towards offering points.

My examples come from the tombs of Ty, Ptahhotep and Akhethotep, Nikauisesi, and Merefnebef. As I was able to visit three of these tombs in person, I can draw on my experience of moving through the space and viewing the decoration relative to the offering installations, in addition to the information from the tomb publications. Although I was able to visit the tombs of Ihy/Idut and Mereruka, the decoration in the former is not as well preserved as in the other tombs, while the latter comprises numerous rooms, not all of which were open when I visited. Therefore, I do not include these two tombs among the examples discussed below. For the tombs not illustrated below, I have examined the images of offering

¹⁸⁴ In Ty's tomb, a false door for Neferhetepes (Ty's wife) appears on the west wall of the corridor leading from the courtyard to the inner area of the tomb. The offering bearers in this corridor (on both walls) are not all oriented towards her false door, but to the inner rooms and Ty's offering chapel; the captions state that the offerings are for Ty himself.

bearers and cult participants in them, and they do accord with my argument that they are oriented toward the offering chapel and, in the chapel itself, to the offering points¹⁸⁵. I include the west chapel of Merefnebef – while I was not able to visit it, its decoration is very well preserved, and it bears great similarity to the neighbouring chapel of Nyankhnefertem¹⁸⁶, the latter having been modelled on the former (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 138, 277).

Ty

Ty's tomb has a portico entrance, which, alongside those of other Old Kingdom tombs, has been discussed in detail by Chauvet, (2007a; 2011). A parade of personified funerary domains¹⁸⁷ is located on its east and west walls (**Plan 6.1**).

The scenes on the west side are very damaged, but the labels of the personified domains are visible still on the east side – among them is 'for the *ka* of Ty', reinforcing that the goods being carried by the figures are for the sustenance of the tomb owner. The figures on both sides are moving towards the tomb entrance, so those on the east face the first of two narrow and irregular-shaped serdab slits (**Diagram 6.1a**, *Vorhalle*).

Figures of offering bearers are next encountered in the pillared hall (*Pfeilerhof*, **Plan 6.1**), on either side of the second serdab slit (north wall). Most of these men, who carry meat and poultry offerings, are labelled as *ka* priests (**Figure 6.1**).

¹⁸⁵ The decoration of the tombs of Kaiemheset and Kaiemsenu is not well enough preserved to ascertain the orientation of offering bearer and cult participant figures (only the west wall of the latter remains, held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA29.9.1). The tomb of Ankhmahor has damaged or unfinished decoration in some key areas that make a complete picture of the orientation of the figures difficult to paint; where the decoration is well preserved, it does accord with my suggestion regarding their orientation (the north wall of room II features offering bearers oriented as if away from the offering chapel, but the other walls are damaged so it is unclear whether these would originally have been oriented, for example, toward a figure of the tomb owner). The decoration of the chapel of Irukhaptah predominantly comprises statues, as discussed below and in the following chapter (**Section 7.ii**). The offering bearer and cult participant figures only feature on the north end of the east wall; they appear at the top of the wall and directed toward an image of the tomb owner seated at an offering table, as well as at the far edge of the wall, moving as if toward the engaged statues on this wall.

¹⁸⁶ Both chapels are entered through the west wall. The east wall of Nyankhnefertem's chapel is immediately visible upon entry and dominated by eight striding figures of the tomb owner, arranged symmetrically as two groups of four figures, each facing the centre of the wall; the figures of offering bearers and cult participants on the remaining walls face the west wall and the false doors.

¹⁸⁷ On the topic of Old Kingdom funerary domains, see Jacquet-Gordon 1962; Khaled 2013 and 2016; Moreno García 2013; Papazian 2012.

Image of tomb removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Steindorff 1913.

Plan 6.1: The tomb of Ty.

Source: Adapted from Steindorff 1913: Blatt 1.

Image of orientation removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Steindorff 1913.

Diagram 6.1a: Orientation of offering bearers in portico and pillared hall of Ty's complex.

Source: Adapted from Steindorff 1913: Blatt 1.

While they do not direct visitors towards the offering chapel, they do face the slit in the serdab, which would house statues of the deceased. The varied positioning of their arms and the asymmetry promote an impression of movement and dynamism: there are small differences in the ways in which the figures on each side of the slit hold birds and carry forelegs. The pattern of the figures – their symmetry in the framing¹⁸⁸ of the serdab squint – is broken. Additionally, the hieroglyphic captions are asymmetrical.

Image of offering bearers removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Scremin 2018.

Figure 6.1: Offering bearers approaching the serdab squint in the pillared hall of Ty's tomb. The figures exhibit variation in their postures. Each row faces the squint, yet they are not symmetrically arranged.
Source: Scremin 2018: 24, fig. 5a, after Épron and Daumas 1939: pl. XV.

The pillared hall's decoration is damaged, but boats transporting potential offering goods, including animals and grain, feature on the west wall and figures carrying Ty on a palanquin on the east wall; both the boats and the figures are facing toward the corridor that leads toward the offering chapel. The boats on the west wall are also travelling toward a large striding image of the tomb owner, as well as in the direction of the false door belonging to Ty's son Demedj (located next to corridor I – **Diagram 6.1b**, bottom left). Offering bearers are not found in combination with this false door – the adjoining south wall's decoration is lost, so it is unknown whether such figures appeared here originally.

Corridor I leads to the offering chapel and features another false door, this time of Neferhetepes, Ty's wife. The offering bearers on the corridor walls are directed towards Ty's chapel, rather than toward Neferhetepes' false door; for example, the figures on the same wall as her false door are not arranged either side to face the door. It seems that Ty's chapel takes priority in regard to the way in which visitors are being 'directed' by the offering bearers. However, visitors would still have to pass Neferhetepes' false door *en route*, as well as that of Ty's son, Demejd. Therefore, offerings could be made to these family members before moving to Ty's chapel.

¹⁸⁸ The subject of 'framing' is covered in more depth in **Chapter 7**.

Image of orientation removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Steindorff 1913.

Diagram 6.1b: Orientation of offering bearers in middle part of Ty's complex.
Source: Adapted from Steindorff 1913: Blatt 1.

The storage room (*Speisekammer*, **Diagram 6.1b**) adjoining corridor II is similar to that found in Nikauisesi's tomb (discussed below) in both its size relative to the tomb's other rooms and its decorative motifs. The east wall, in which the door is situated, is decorated with images of various vessels in stands, although some of the detail has now worn away (**Figure 6.2a**). An accumulation of similar vessels and stands are seen on the south wall, in the top-most registers; the four registers directly underneath are filled with offering bearers carrying such vessels alongside other offerings. The offering bearers approach a striding image of the tomb owner. Although he is pictured together with family members and officials, he is depicted on a larger scale, visually reinforcing his importance and the idea that the goods are intended for him. The bottom-most register of figures extends below the figure of Ty and his family, as if the offering bearers are heading past the family and out into the corridor, continuing the impression that they are moving toward the chapel.



Figure 6.2a: Vessels in stands, Ty's storage room, east wall; offering bearers are seen on the adjoining north wall (see further 6.2b).

Source: Author's photograph.

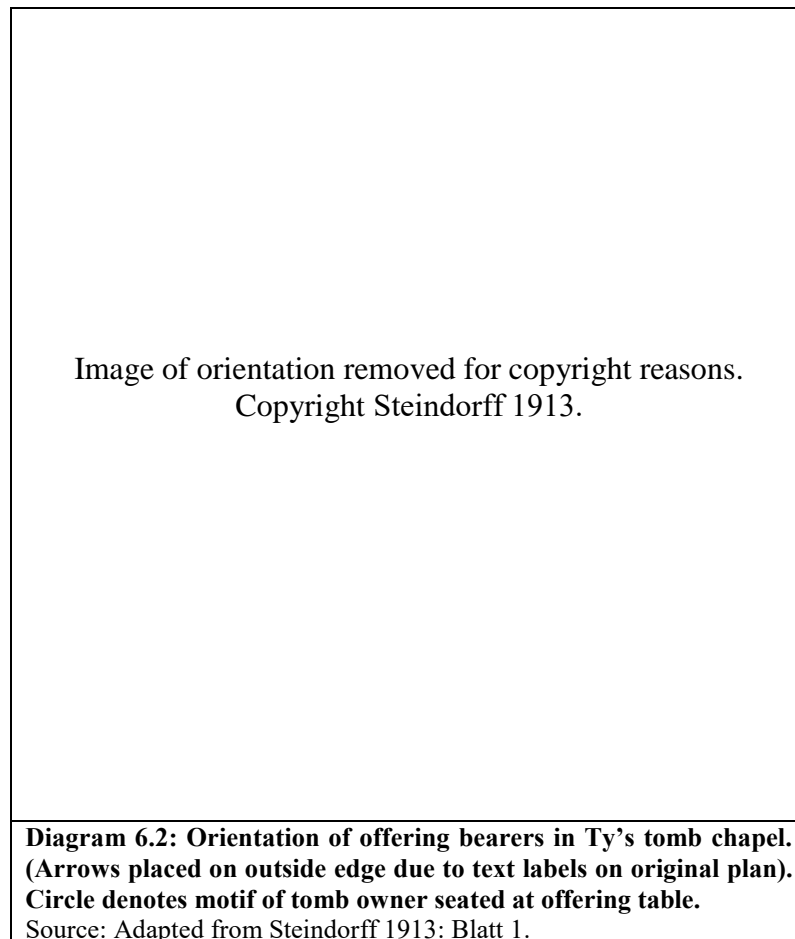


Figure 6.2b: Recess in Ty's storage room, north wall. Offerings are depicted immediately above the recess; numerous offering bearers are also visible.

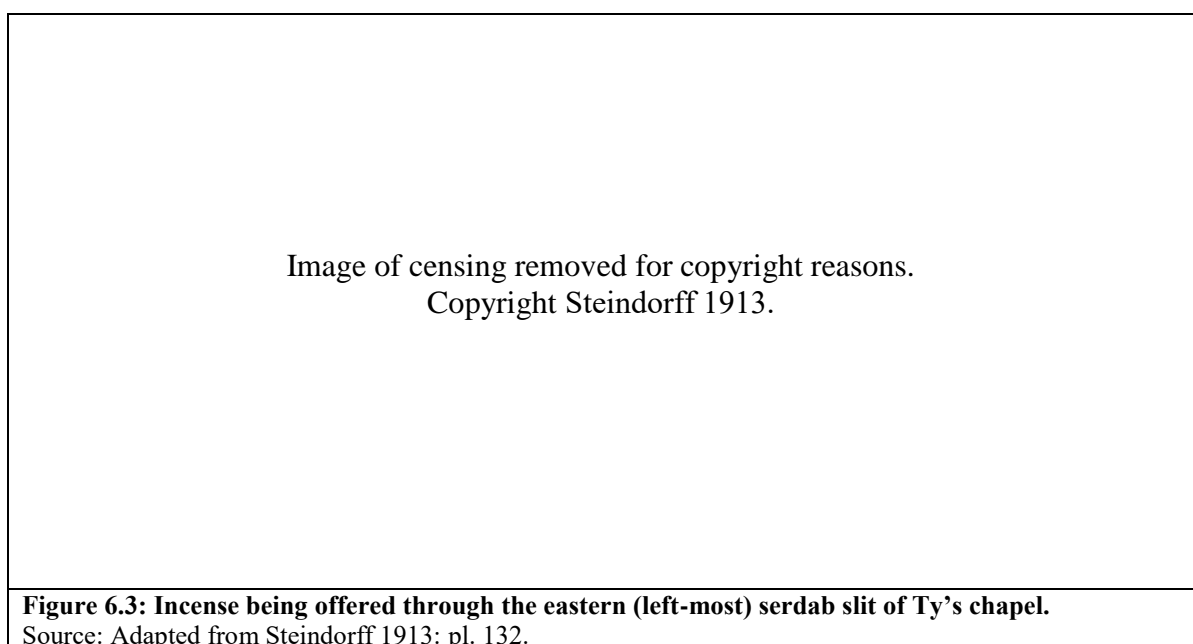
Source: Author's photograph.

The north wall is almost identical to the south and its decoration is even better preserved. On both walls, the offering bearers are heading in the direction of the second corridor, which leads to the chapel. Additionally, the north wall has a recess; images of bread loaves adorn the top edge, perhaps a visual indicator of the goods to be stored there (**Figure 6.2b**). The offering bearers also approach a large-scale image of the tomb owner, who is depicted alongside his wife and son, and officials. The west wall of the storage room does not feature offering bearers, but houses scenes of baking, brewing, and pottery making, as well as an accounting scene in which scribes receive reports of the funerary estate (*pr dt*).

Upon entry to the chapel proper (**Diagram 6.2, Kapelle**), the east wall (on the visitor's left) does not have images of offering bearers, although agricultural scenes do feature. The south wall, directly ahead of the visitor on entry, houses the second serdab and three serdab slits.



Cult participants, who are ‘burning incense for Ty’, frame the left-most (eastern) of three serdab squints (**Figure 6.3**). On each side, a *ka* priest offers incense toward the squint – or rather, toward the statue(s) of the tomb owner inside the serdab. Three figures behind the left priest are captioned ‘servants of the *pr dt*’ (funerary estate).



This is a clear example of broken symmetry: the two figures and their hieroglyphic captions are almost symmetrical in their framing of the serdab squint, but their arms are in slightly different positions. This breaks the symmetry on each edge of the squint, creating a sense of motion and drawing the eye towards it. Additionally, the scenes that accompany the priests to the left and right are different, therefore breaking the symmetry further. The central serdab slit is framed by various types of birds captioned as coming from the *pr dt*, while the right-most (western) serdab slit has depictions of cattle butchery either side of it. Offering bearers are depicted above the right-most slit, bringing goods toward the tomb owner seated at the offering table, and they continue slightly beyond the slit itself.

The chapel's northern wall is decorated with a wide range of scenes, including fishing, fowling, boating activities, agriculture, and cattle, as well as a parade of personified domains – this parade is positioned at the height of the top of the doorway and extends across the length of the northern wall (i.e. the bottom wall in **Figure 6.2**). The types of offerings being brought by the personified domains are accompanied by labels, one of which indicates that invocation offerings (*pṛt-ḥrw*) are among the depicted estates of Ty. The whole scene is captioned 'bringing of voice offerings by the domains of the *pr dt* that are in Lower and Upper Egypt for the unique friend, Ty' (*inṯ pṛt-ḥrw in nīwwt nt pr-dt ntt m t3 mḥw (t3) rsw n smr-w'ty Ty*).

Image of butchers and offering bearers removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Wild 1966.

Figure 6.4a: Line drawn detail of butchers and offering bearers between the two false doors in Ty's chapel, west wall (first and second registers from bottom). Three figures appear on the right of the top register; four on the left.
Source: Wild 1966: pl. CLXXIX.

Image of offering bearers removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Wild 1966.

Figure 6.4b: Line drawn detail of offering bearers between the two false doors in Ty's chapel, west wall (third register from bottom). Five figures are depicted on the left side; only four on the right. Register of offerings above not pictured.
Source: Wild 1966: pl. CLXXVIII, detail.

The west wall houses two false doors and single offering table located at the southern door. The decorated area between the two false doors features offering bearers heading toward these doors (three registers) (**Figure 6.4a-b**), as well as piles of offerings above this (10 registers). The bottom-most register contains images of cattle butchery. The two registers above comprise two rows of offering bearers (five of whom are overseers of *ka* priests).

The figures in the three registers are arranged almost symmetrically: in each register, half face the southern false door and half the northern one. However, in the topmost register there are five figures on the left (south) and only four on the right (north), breaking the symmetry. In the middle register, although on each side two men grasp a pair of birds and two hold forelegs, there is slight variation in their attitudes that breaks the symmetry. Overall, the differences in the figures on each side of the composition creates an impression of movement, which draws the eye away from the centre and towards its edges – and hence to the false door on each side.

The men holding forelegs (**Figure 6.4a**, top left and right) exhibit forward lean. The offering bearers could be interpreted as leaning into the direction of motion, i.e. toward the false doors, and encouraging visitors to head in that direction also. However, the butchers in the register below are also leaning forward, but toward the slaughtered animals. It is possible that, in both cases, forward lean is showing direction of action rather than direction of (walking) motion.

The area between each false door and its adjacent wall is also decorated with offering bearers, who likewise head toward each door (10 registers on each side, with two figures in each register). These areas are damaged, but some of the men are labelled as overseers of *ka* priests and among the captions are 'bringing offerings', 'bringing of choice cuts', and the statement: 'these are for the *ka* of the sole companion Ty', again stressing the destination of the goods (Wild 1966: pls. CLXXX-CLXXXI). Despite the damage, there is obvious

variation in the figures' attitudes and in the goods that they are transporting in the direction of the false doors, although the details of each scene are difficult to discern in many cases.

Akhethotep and Ptahhotep

The two chapels – one each for Akhethotep and Ptahhotep (**Plan 6.2**, rooms 3 and 6, respectively) – are fully decorated, but the corridor-like room that is the first to be entered when visiting the tomb (room 1) features incomplete outlines of motifs as well as completed reliefs (Davies 1901: 4). The pillared hall (room 2), ante-room to Ptahhotep's chapel (room 5), and other rooms are undecorated.

Image of tomb removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Harpur and Scremin 2008.

Plan 6.2: The double tomb of Akhethotep and Ptahhotep.
Source: Adapted from Harpur and Scremin 2008: xvii.

Room 1 features offering bearers on the west wall and a parade of the domains on the east wall. In both cases, the figures are facing into the tomb. Both walls are damaged, particularly

the upper registers, but eleven figures labelled as *ka* priests can be made out: two on the east wall and nine on the west wall (Davies 1901: pls. IV, V, VIII). There is also a small scene of wine pouring with the caption ‘storing the wine for the *pwt-hrw*’ (ibid. 11 and pl. XI). There are no further figures on any of the thicknesses of the three doorways that lead off from this room. This might be due to the decoration being unfinished, but it is possible that these areas were not intended to be decorated. None of the three adjoining rooms are decorated. In the two chapels, there are offering bearers depicted as if walking towards the false doors and accompanying offering tables.

In Akhethotep’s T-shaped chapel, the figures travel around the walls (clockwise and anti-clockwise) towards the west wall (**Diagram 6.3a**). Whichever way a visitor walks around the chapel, if they view these images, they will be ‘guided’ towards the offering point. If the chapel is entered from the pillared hall, the offering point is directly visible upon entry to the chapel, as it is positioned straight ahead in the visitor’s sight line; if entered from the northern passage, the figures would guide the visitor toward the offering point.

<p>Image of orientation removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Harpur and Scremin 2008.</p>	<p>Image of orientation removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Harpur and Scremin 2008.</p>
<p>Diagram 6.3a: Orientation of offering bearers in Akhethotep’s offering chapel. Circles denote motif of tomb owner seated at offering table. Source: Adapted from Harpur and Scremin 2008: xvii.</p>	<p>Diagram 6.3b: Orientation of offering bearers in Ptahhotep’s offering chapel. Circle denotes motif of tomb owner seated at offering table. Source: Adapted from Harpur and Scremin 2008: xvii.</p>

The offering points in Ptahhotep’s chapel are visible as a visitor enters the room, but they are positioned to the right, on the west wall. Only one of the false doors (the furthest from the entry) has an offering table at its base. The figures of offering bearers guide the visitor in an anti-clockwise motion towards this false door and table (**Diagram 6.3b**). If the visitor

travelled clockwise around the room instead, they would encounter figures of offering bearers oriented in the direction of the false door and table once they reached the south wall. However, to reach the south wall, the visitor would have to pass by the east wall, which does not feature rows of offering bearers and cult participants. Some of the motifs on this wall could be considered as being related to the production of offerings¹⁸⁹: groups of cattle and birds are being herded towards a large figure of the tomb owner; men in boats sail produce towards him; some people are capturing birds; others are producing wine. These figures are still oriented as if ‘travelling’ in a clockwise manner and hence toward the west wall and its installation, and do not disrupt the overall impression of movement toward it.

Nikauisesi

<p>Image of tomb removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000.</p>	<p>Image of orientation removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000.</p>
<p>Plan 6.3: The tomb of Nikauisesi. Source: Adapted from Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pl. 39.</p>	<p>Diagram 6.4: Orientation of offering bearers in Nikauisesi’s tomb. Source: Adapted from Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pl. 39.</p>

An examination of offering processions in Nikauisesi’s tomb reveals that the figures are directed towards the main offering chapel (room III, see **Plan 6.3**) and that within this room they are heading towards the offering table itself (**Diagram 6.4**). As rooms V-VII inclusive are undecorated, I discuss rooms I-IV inclusive and any decorated door thicknesses.

¹⁸⁹ The east wall features scenes that include desert animals copulating and being captured, men exercising, and boat building; while these might not be obviously related to offerings, they could reflect life in the funerary domains.

Although the images in room I include bread and beer making scenes, they generally do not concern offerings directly. However, groups of geese and cattle being led toward the tomb owner are pictured on the north wall, and the groups of cattle also appear on the door thicknesses between rooms I and II – the cattle and the men leading them are facing in that direction. Room II contains images of offering bearers on all four walls, and two doorways: one to the undecorated courtyard (room VII) and another to the offering chapel (room III). The offering bearers in room II head in the direction of the doorway to the offering chapel, and on three of the four walls they also head towards large figures of the tomb owner. The only scene in which figures are moving in the opposite direction is a palanquin scene on the north wall. In this scene, it seems that the deceased is being carried towards the tomb exit/entrance; yet this echoes the depictions of him on the entrance thicknesses, in which he is also shown facing outwards from the tomb.

Image of offering bearers removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000.

Figure 6.5: Line drawing of offering bearers oriented as if travelling from room II to room III (chapel). Variations in the attitudes of their arms, and the vessels that they hold, break the composition's symmetry. Door thicknesses, rooms II-III, Nikauisesi's tomb.

Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: pl. 56.

On the thicknesses of the door between rooms II and III appears another example of broken symmetry (**Figure 6.5**). Small differences in the attitudes of the figures' arms, the vessels that they transport, and the hieroglyphic captions prompt the eye toward the doorway of room III – the offering chapel – toward which the figures are oriented.

In the corridor area between rooms II and III (the offering chapel), further offering bearers are depicted as heading from the former towards the latter. Those on the east thickness are contiguous with the larger scene of offering bearers on room III's east wall, where they are accompanied by butchery motifs.

The other walls of room III show offerings being carried towards the *hṭp*-shaped offering table on the northern part of the west wall. There is no false door above the offering table, but there likely was one originally (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 47)¹⁹⁰. A limestone bench is built against the northern wall of room III and directly above this is depicted a procession of offering bearers facing the west wall; the upper registers are lost, but the remaining fragments are suggestive of two further registers of a similar procession. The decoration on the south wall has been erased due to the presence of an intrusive, later shaft (ibid. 46).

Room IV might have been used as a storeroom for offerings or ritual-related equipment due to its small size, the limestone-topped bench built into its north wall, and the decorative motifs. The walls are decorated with stacks of offerings and provisions, as well as containers probably used for storage (ibid. 51). The tomb owner appears on the west wall in a striding pose, being approached by offering bearers. Above the bench on the north wall are depictions of granary-shaped storehouses that are labelled as containing various grains and fruits, as well as images of wine jars, and oils – these visually reinforce the potential function of the room.

Room IV is entered via a doorway from room III. Each door thickness bears figures of four men dragging two large vessels of oil¹⁹¹; although they appear to be facing into this room (rather than out of it, toward the chapel), this could indicate that the oil was intended to be stored in there. As visitors exit room IV and back into room III, the orientation of offering bearer and cult participant figures on the west wall visible immediately ahead of them act to direct them toward the offering installation.

¹⁹⁰ Fragments of a wall scene, which were found in the main shaft of the tomb and bear Nikauisesi's name, likely originate from the northern and southern recesses above the offering table, where the false door would have been positioned (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 47).

¹⁹¹ In each image, the line of text above the figures reads 'dragging the *stī-ḥb* and *ḥknw* [oils]' and there is a row of eight jars depicted in the register above the text. These might or might not be the 'sacred oils', of which there are usually seven. Seven jars of the 'sacred oils' are depicted and labelled on the north wall of room IV.

Merefnebef

Merefnebef's main (west) chapel (**Plan 6.4**) consists of one room and provides an interesting point of comparison to the other examples described above. Unusually, it is entered through the western wall¹⁹². Therefore, it is the east wall that is visible immediately on entry.

Image of tomb removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Plan 6.4: The tomb of Merefnebef.

Source: Adapted from Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. VI.

The east wall is densely decorated. The far south side includes four registers (**Figure 6.6a**, sections 29-32, and **6.6c**, far right) that are the result of changes made by one of Merefnebef's sons at some point after the tomb owner's death (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 141). I do not include them in the discussion below as they are not part of the original composition – other scenes of unknown content would have filled this space.

Along the top of this wall, there is a *ḥtp-di-nṣwt* offering formula (18) (numbers in brackets denote labelled sections of **Figure 6.6a**). A row of personified funerary estates is depicted at the bottom of the wall (20), along with male figures bringing geese and forelegs (28), with a butchery scene of two cattle at the south end (28, far right). All of the figures, except those engaged in butchery, are oriented towards two symmetrical, central images of the tomb owner accompanied by his mother (25, 26). There are two vertical lines of text in between

¹⁹² Merefnebef's mastaba is unusual in its orientation, lying on an E-W axis (rather than N-S), likely due to the positioning of the cliff into which it was built (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 250). The location of the burial shaft is also irregular, as it is spatially disconnected from the false doors on the western wall of the west chapel (ibid.)

them, giving Merefnebef's names and titles, which do not lie directly above the further vertical line of text in the register underneath. This is a *ḥtp-di-nṯswt* formula, reading: 'An offering that Osiris gives for the sole companion Merefnebef' (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 135). The vertical axis of the overall composition is broken by the 'out of line' columns of text.

Image of chapel wall removed for copyright reasons.
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Figure 6.6a: Schematic drawing of the east wall of Merefnebef's west chapel.

Green arrows denote orientation of large-scale images of the tomb owner; orange the orientation of offering bearers. Orientation of texts not indicated. Numbers designate scenes referred to in the source publication. Source: Adapted from Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 115, Drawing 8.

Image of chapel wall removed for copyright reasons.
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Figure 6.6b: Line drawing of Merefnebef's west chapel, east wall, north side (19-25 and north part of 28 in Diagram 5.4). Note the forward lean exhibited by the men carrying forelegs (far right, bottom).

Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. XX.

Image of chapel wall removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 6.6c: Line drawing of Merefnebef's west chapel, east wall, south side (26-32 in Diagram 5.4a).
Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. XXI.

Symmetry on the horizontal axis is also broken: the pattern of funerary estates is disrupted by two men carrying forelegs, who head up the procession; but at the same time, these men almost mirror those on the other side of the text. The figures of men carrying legs of meat on either side exhibit forward lean, which creates implied movement, or else a dynamic gesture of offering. They seem to be moving/gesturing towards, and framing, the *hṯp-dī-nīswt* offering text, highlighting it as a salient message.

On the south side of the wall (**Figure 6.6c**), there are two large-scale images of the tomb owner (versus three on the north). As changes to the far south of the wall were made by Merefnebef's son, it is unclear whether any further images of him appeared here previously and how this might have affected the original symmetry.

Although the east wall does not hold the false doors, there are still components that highlight the giving of offerings to the tomb owner. The captions on this wall mention the bringing of offerings. Three or four of the figures bringing forelegs (20, 28) are labelled as Merefnebef's sons (likely a mirrored image showing two sets of the same two sons, one set either side of the vertical inscription¹⁹³). Even the scene of fowling (27), which might be interpreted as a scene of 'daily life', features captions that indicate otherwise¹⁹⁴. Two rows of offering bearers bringing calves, holding birds by the neck, or bringing trays of produce are depicted

¹⁹³ The damaged caption next to one of the figures makes his identity uncertain (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 135, 138).

¹⁹⁴ Whether or not fowling scenes depict 'daily life' activity is debated: see Feucht 1992; Manniche 2002 [1987]: 38-40; van Walsem 2005: 71-83.

in registers behind the boat; the captions indicate that they are *ka* priests of the funerary estate who are ‘bringing gifts’ (ibid. 126-27).

The east wall is the first interior wall that a visitor sees upon entry to the chapel. Its decoration does not seem to ‘guide’ the visitor to the offering points that are located behind them, on the west wall through which they just entered. The break in symmetry in the central part of the east wall aids in creating a sense of motion. Even if the figures do not direct visitors toward offering points in this particular case, the dynamic balance might well prompt the eye of the viewer to move to the adjacent north or south walls: both of these walls feature figures that ‘guide’ visitors, as the figures are oriented towards the west wall and its offering installations, as well as towards images of the tomb owner.

While the south wall does not feature depictions of offering bearers, there are two scenes captioned ‘bringing the gifts’ (*int ndt-ḥr*), in which men drive cows and geese towards Merefnebef and his wife (transliteration ibid. 151). The couple watch harpists and dancers who face them. It is likely that the gifts are related to the cult or the funerary domains; and likewise the dancers, particularly as they are labelled as dancing ‘for the *ka* of Fefi’ or ‘for your *ka*, Fefi’ (Fefi being one of Merefnebef’s names) (ibid. 155-56). Piles of food and drink are located in the topmost register of the wall, while boats transporting animals appear in the lowest register.

The north wall appears more directly related to the offering cult, as it features the motif of Merefnebef seated before an offering table, a tabular offering list, a butchery scene, and offering bearers who are facing and travelling in the direction of the tomb owner and the west wall – where the main offering points are located. At the base of the north wall is a rock-hewn bench, which is undecorated aside from the coating of white paint (ibid. 102). Eight musicians are depicted in the bottom-most register, underneath the tomb owner. To the right of these are three offering bearers captioned as ‘bringing the choice of forelegs’ (*shpt stpt ḥpšw*) (transliteration ibid. 114). Two of them are leaning forward, as with other examples of men carrying forelegs from the aforementioned tombs. The other offering bearers are arranged in two rows (of six men each) and are located in registers in front of the motif of Merefnebef at the offering table, with the tabular offering list directly above. The offering bearers are captioned as ‘bringing the choice of forelegs and birds’ (ibid. 110). They do not exhibit forward lean, but do all face toward the tomb owner and the west wall.

The west wall is divided into two by the chapel entrance in the middle, which reaches the height of the ceiling. The north side of the wall and south side of the wall therefore seem to form two units, each with their own false door and offering table.

The north side of the west wall has a false door approximately in its centre. To the right of it (north) is a large, striding figure of the tomb owner with his wife and son, above a row of five offering bearers. To the left of it (south) are more offering bearers: fourteen men arranged in four registers. Each row is captioned as ‘bringing the choice of birds for the *ka*’ (*shpt stp(t) ʒpdw n kʒ*) of Merefnebef (transliteration *ibid.* 97). The foremost offering bearer in this bottom register stretches out a goose towards the tomb owner. All of the figures on the north side of the west wall are facing the false door, including those of the tomb owner – only his wife, who is sat at his feet with her head turned towards him, faces the other way.

The south side of the west wall has a false door off-centre. To the left (south) is another large, striding figure of the tomb owner with his wife and son, above a row of offering bearers; these figures all face the false door. The three offering bearers are captioned as ‘bringing the offerings by the *ka* servants of the funerary estate’ (*shpt ht in hm(w)-kʒ pr n dt*) of Merefnebef (transliteration *ibid.* 171). To the right (north) is a large image of the tomb owner. Although he faces away from the false door, the image of him seated at a table laden with offerings, with an offering list above, echoes the slab scene on the door itself.

Below the table scene is a row of four male offering bearers to the right and two rows of musicians on the left. The musicians face away from the false door, while the offering bearers face and travel towards it, as well as towards the image of Merefnebef seated at the offering table. The four offering bearers are captioned similarly to those on the left (south) side of the wall: ‘bringing the choice of forelegs by the the *ka* servants of the funerary estate’ of Merefnebef (*shpt stpt hpšw [in] hm(w)-kʒ pr n dt*) (transliteration *ibid.*)

Offering bearers do not appear on all four walls of Merefnebef’s chapel, but where they do, they are moving in the direction of the false doors and offering points. Perhaps movement guiding functions of imagery were not as crucial in single-room chapels, like that of Merefnebef, as the offering points would be easy to locate. Irukaptah’s rock-cut tomb is another example of a single-room chapel and is unusual for its minimal text and large number of engaged statues. At the northern end of Irukaptah’s tomb (where the entrance is located), he is not seated at the traditional offering table laden with loaves, but in front of piles of offerings on various stands; at the southern end he *is* seated at the traditional table. Interestingly, three offering bearers approach the northern image of him, and thus face away

from the false door – which is located at the other end of the tomb, on the west wall – and towards the tomb entrance. However, the offering point in Irukthapah's tomb is within sightline from the doorway and, as discussed previously, the statues might play their own role in focusing the attention of the visitor.

6.iii. Internal tomb imagery: action guiding

Aside from images' potential to guide the direction of movement of visitors or cult participants, they might have the potential to guide the actions of these people vis-à-vis the performance of the offering cult. With regard to 'action guiding', I examine the actions displayed by images of cult participants. Rather than describe every occurrence of the depicted actions, which are similar across tombs and are often repeated even within a single tomb, I use illustrative examples to discuss the significance of the repetition or 'redundancy' of motifs that drove home to viewers that the types of actions that were desired in these locations. I also suggest another way in which participation from the living was prompted was through offering scenes: namely, the need for the living to 'complete' certain scenes via their presence and actions.

Reconsidering 'redundancy'

The notion of 'redundancy' features among Renfrew's indicators of ritual activity, as first introduced in **Section 3.i**. The term denotes the repetition of symbols that might be found in the decoration of a "sacred zone" and is one of the indicators related to the "focusing of attention" in sacred spaces (Renfrew 1985: 14, 16, 19; 1994: 51)¹⁹⁵. Renfrew highlights that figurative schemes might only be intelligible to the initiated, to those familiar with the system of representation: "...in many cases where depictions are used in a religious context, their role is to reinforce what is already known and perhaps to act as a mnemonic" (1994: 53). This relates to 'familiarity' with tomb layouts and decorative schemes that I mention above.

The term 'redundancy' seems to imply that repetition can be superfluous, even though Renfrew suggests that the symbols are intentionally employed for a specific function in a sacred space (1985: 14, 1994: 51). While I am only drawing on aspects of Renfrew's model and using it to different ends, the notion of redundancy is applicable. However, drawing on the above quote, I propose that the term 'reinforcing' more aptly describes the role played by repeated offering-related motifs within Old Kingdom tombs: the repetition of these

¹⁹⁵ Renfrew does not explicitly mention semiotics, but his remarks allude to the latter as he uses terms including 'index' and 'signifier', and discusses the relation of symbols to meanings (1985; 1994). I adopt a multimodal social semiotic approach in **Chapter 7**.

impresses upon the viewer the sense that what these images depict is significant. The term also accommodates the fact that some motifs are not identically repeated; many motifs feature some variation within a single tomb or between tombs, and some motifs may be expanded into more elaborate scenes.

The notion of ‘reinforcing’ is useful when considering the tabular offering list, which often appears alongside the motif of the tomb owner seated at the offering table. In addition to a long, tabular list, a short list of offerings is usually placed within the motif itself (**Figure 6.7**).

Image of offering table scene removed for copyright reasons.
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Figure 6.7: Merefnebef seated at the offering table in a large-scale scene including a tabular offering list (red outline, right), complemented by a similar small-scale scene in the panel of the false door containing an abbreviated offering list (red outline, left). Merefnebef’s west chapel, west wall, south side.
Source: Adapted from Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. XIII.

The abbreviated list of offerings that occurs in conjunction with the motif of the tomb owner seated at the offering table could be interpreted as an ‘inventory’ or ‘abstract’ of the larger offering list, and thus ‘reinforces’ it in a shorter format. Additionally, the shorter list is perhaps accessible to people who are partially literate – the hieroglyphs are logographic, denoting the type of item, and are accompanied by a numeral, denoting the quantity.

Due to an expansion in the number of offerings being included, the list moves from the false door panel to the western wall in the mid-5th Dynasty at Giza (Roeten 2014: 35, footnote 10, citing El-Metwally 1992: 9-10). As the offering list had always been accompanied by the motif of the tomb owner seated at the offering table, this motif moves together with it (Roeten 2014: 187). The abbreviated offering list is closely connected with the offering table motif on the false door and on the western and southern walls (ibid. 35). While Roeten's study concentrates on Giza tombs, the association between the two motifs also appears to be strong at Saqqara (although I do not employ statistical methods as Roeten does).

I suggest that the repetition of images is a device used to encourage desired actions, as well as to focus attention. Renfrew's notion of 'focusing attention' refers to features, including imagery, to direct the attention of cult participants to the deity or force (by way of a cult image, for example), and/or to induce "a state of heightened awareness or religious excitement" (1994: 51; 1985: 16, 18). Regarding the tombs, the focal presence for visitors is the deceased, and the focal point is the false door and/or an image of the tomb owner¹⁹⁶.

Arguably the most important motif found in conjunction with offering points is that of the tomb owner seated at a table laden with offerings. The table in front of which the deceased is depicted in the image is usually echoed by an offering table in the round situated at the foot of the false door, although the former is represented on a stand and the latter is placed flat on the ground or on a platform. The surfaces of offering table installations can also be decorated with images of offerings and vessels similar to those pictured around the tomb owner in the offering table motif (**Section 5.ii**). Additionally, larger scale and more elaborate wall scenes featuring the same motif may be situated near to false doors and offering tables. Texts denoting the particular types of offerings normally accompany larger and smaller scenes of the tomb owner seated at the offering table; the hieroglyphs are placed around the tomb owner and/or arranged in tabular lists above or next to him.

Indeed, the repetition of the motif of the tomb owner seated in front of a table of offerings, as well as a list of offerings, occurs even in one-room chapels. Merefnebef's one-room west chapel has the offering table motif repeated several times: on the west wall it appears in a large scene, accompanied by a tabular offering list, and in the panels of two false doors on a small scale (**Figure 6.8a**); on the north wall it is depicted alongside another tabular offering

¹⁹⁶ Here I do not consider the potential for repeated motifs to attract the attention of the deceased or to incite a state of heightened awareness in participants: regarding the former, my focus is on the employment of imagery in eliciting ritual actions from participants rather than the deceased; and for the latter, such a state is not explicitly mentioned in offering-related texts.

list (**Figure 6.8b**); and on the east wall are two further seated offering table scenes likely added after Merefnebef's death by his youngest son (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 248-49).

Image of chapel interior removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 6.8a: West wall of Merefnebef's main chapel including both false doors. The scene to the far right (Merefnebef striding and, below him, offering bearers facing toward the door) is out of shot. Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. LXXII.

Image of chapel wall removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 6.8b: Line drawing of north wall of Merefnebef's main (west) chapel. Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. IX.

The repeated motifs of the tomb owner seated at the offering table – on different scales – help to focus visitors' attention on offering locations, as suggested by Renfrew's notion of

redundancy. However, this is not the only role of these images. As discussed in **Chapter 3**, depictions of the tomb owner also serve to presentify him/her in the tomb space¹⁹⁷.

Returning to Irukhaptah's one-room tomb, which features 14 statues as discussed in **Section 5.ii**, it is an interesting example of repetition. The hyper-representation of the tomb owner in statue form notwithstanding, the motif of him seated at the offering table is still repeated three times: twice on the east wall, above either end of a *ḥtp-dī-niswt* frieze, with the northernmost image directly above the serdab¹⁹⁸; and once on the west wall in the panel of the false door. The offering table motif is integral to creating a tomb environment and underlining its function to visitors. It is the location for the performance of the mortuary cult, and inextricably linked with this is manifesting the presence of the deceased within the offering space in the capacity as the receiver of offerings – even when other images of the tomb owner are featured in the tomb.

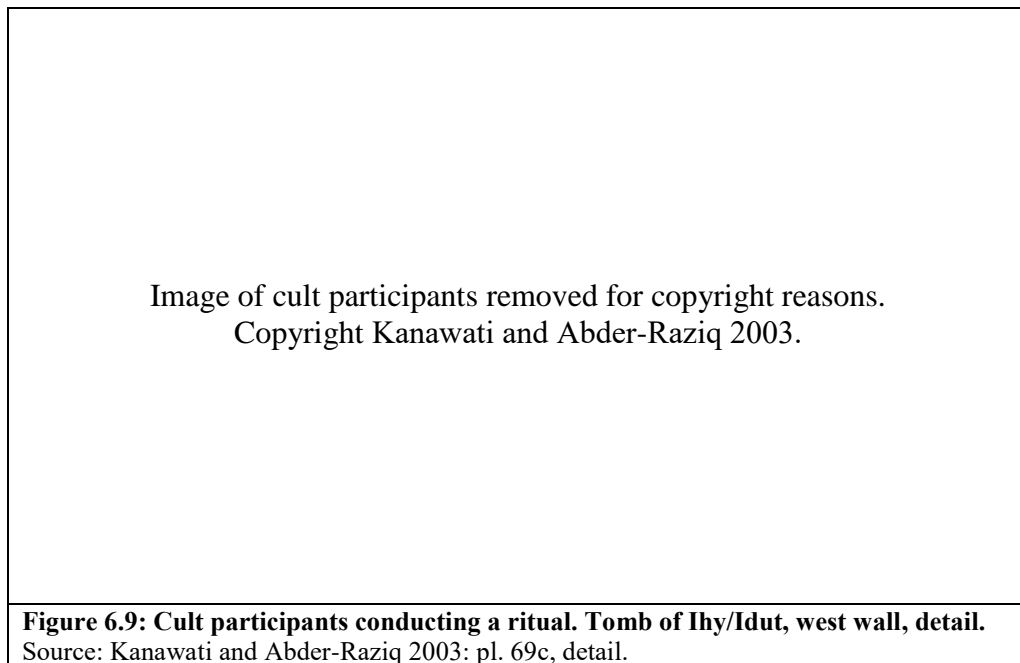
As mentioned, the offering table motif appears not only on false doors, but in large-scale scenes and in close connection with offering lists. Elements of the offering ritual began to be pictured on the walls of the tomb from the end of the 5th Dynasty (Robins 2016: 116). These scenes often depict figures performing rituals in front of the tomb owner, who is seated at the offering table, and are commonly found at the focal point of cult activity in the tomb (Hays 2010: 8). The juxtaposition of tabular offering lists with depictions of cult participants carrying out ritual actions is evidenced in the Saqqara tombs.

Depictions of people participating in the cult most frequently concern the transportation and presentation of offerings. These images not only indicated to visitors the types of offerings to be given to the deceased, but directed them toward the main offering points in the tomb, as discussed above. Other depicted actions include gesturing, placing or using offering-related objects, and speaking. The images are sometimes accompanied by text captions, which serve to characterise the depicted activity and to describe the actions being carried out by the figures (Strudwick 2005: 47-48). Some captions have been mentioned above regarding offering bearers, but two different examples comprise **Figures 6.9-6.11** below, in which participants are carrying out the rituals and presenting the offerings that are enumerated in the accompanying lists.

¹⁹⁷ Renfrew does not explicitly state that redundancy aids in manifesting the presence of the deity (or the deceased in this case), but does include the 'presence of the deity' among his ritual indicators (see 1994: 51-52).

¹⁹⁸ The serdab was likely sealed up originally; De Rachewiltz found bricks on the floor in front of this wall (McFarlane 2000: 22, citing De Rachewiltz 1960: 5-6, pls. V-VI).

In the tomb of Ihy (**Figure 6.9**), the offering list and images of the cult participants are joined on the west wall by a scene of the tomb owner seated at an offering table, as well as a false door, which itself features a panel containing the offering table motif. The scene from the tomb of Seankhuptah (**Figure 6.10**) also appears on the west wall of the offering chapel (room I) together with an offering list and a false door. Likewise, on the west wall in the chapel of Ptahhotep (**Figure 6.11**), between the two false doors, there is a scene of cult participants heading toward the tomb owner, who is seated at the offering table; an offering list is located above.



In **Figure 6.9**, an embalmer (*wt*) is kneeling at what is likely an offering slab (as in **Figure 6.10**) and is ‘laying down things’ (*w3h ht*) comprising meat, beer, ‘sweet things’, half-loaves of bread, and wine – items mentioned in the offering list. A second man, a lector priest (*hry-hb*), has his arm raised in an invocation gesture labelled ‘an offering which the king gives’ (*htp-di-niswt*) – an abbreviation of the offering formula that appears in full on the tomb’s false door. The third man (another *hry-hb*) carries a scroll for ‘glorification’ (*s3h*)¹⁹⁹ denoting recitations that accompany the presentation of each offering, specified in the offering list, to the deceased (Hays 2010: 8; Lapp 1986: 184).

Figure 6.10 shows a similar scene. The right-most figure holds a *hs* jar, with the caption ‘pouring water’ (*stt mw*) above him and ‘choice things’ (*stpt ht*) below; the second figure is censensing (*sntr*); the middle figure places an offering slab. The caption ‘*htp-di-niswt*’ is

¹⁹⁹ The rituals utilise speech, actions, and objects, and are referred to as ‘glorifications’ (*s3hw*); they predominantly comprise the presentation of various food items, but also include other activities such as the offering of incense and application of oils (Hays 2010: 8).

accompanied by a column of offerings. The left-most figures (lector priests) hold documents; the man with his arm raised and bent has the label *wdn ht* ‘gesture of offering’²⁰⁰, while the other man performs rituals to transform the deceased into an *akh* (captioned ‘(s)*ht*’).

Image of cult participants removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998.

Figure 6.10: Cult participants conducting a ritual. Tomb of Seankhuipah, west wall, detail.
Note the list of offerings between the kneeling figure and the figure in front of him.
Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: pl. 71, detail.

In scene **Figure 6.11**, there are six cult participants depicted in the topmost register. Their action is oriented toward Ptahhotep, who is seated at the offering table. The participants are putting down the offering slab (as seen in the examples above), making a libation from a *hs* jar, burning incense, performing the *s3h* rituals, and sweeping away footprints.

There is clear juxtaposition of the scenes of cult participants, the offering lists, the offering table motif, and the offering locations themselves; these all seem to reinforce one another visually and spatially. In all cases, the items in the offering list are followed by seated man determinatives holding the relevant item and facing in the same direction as the large-scale figures. The determinatives and large-scale figures reinforce one another in their orientation toward the seated tomb owner, in some of the ritual actions to be carried out, the types of offerings to be given, and (especially in the case of the kneeling figures) the offering positions adopted.

²⁰⁰ See Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: 55, footnote 228 for notes on their translation choice of ‘gesture’ versus ‘dedicating’. They state that the lector priest is not making physical offerings, but merely gesturing alongside a verbal invocation offering (presumably they mean the *htp-di-niswt* captioned in the image). The depictions of offerings that accompany the man placing the offering slab indicate more than just a verbal gesture, however.

Image of offering table scene removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Paget and Pirie 1896.

Figure 6.11: Ptahhotep seated at the offering table with cult participants (top register, outlined in red) and rows of offering bearers (bottom three registers) directed toward him. West wall, between the two false doors. Tabular offering list at the top of the composition not shown.
Source: Adapted from Paget and Pirie 1896: pl. XXXVIII.

The repetition or reinforcement that the same or very similar motifs provide is therefore not a feature that is ‘redundant’ in the sense of being unnecessary, but rather serves a useful function: encouraging the living to participate in offerings and communicating how this can be done. Although the series of rituals outlined in the lists are depicted as being carried out by figures often labelled as priests, the mortuary cult was often carried out by family members or dependents (Hays 2010: 8)²⁰¹. Abbreviated offering lists and representations of gestures, objects, and actions involved would assist those without specialist knowledge in participating in the cult.

²⁰¹ Bolshakov asserts that only the *ka* ‘double’ of the tomb owner read the offering formulae inscribed on the walls inside the tomb and thus “made offering for itself”; he states that priests would read ritual texts from scrolls instead: firstly because depictions indicate this; and secondly because he assumes that priests would not read from the offering list when it was inscribed on the east wall as this would involve turning their back on the false door “which was certainly impossible” (1997: 169). The latter proposal is contradicted by tombs including Merefnebef’s and Nikauisesi’s, which are entered through the west wall. The suggestion that priests read from scrolls, rather from tomb walls, is addressed in **Section 8.ii**.

The completion of scenes

The giving and receiving of offerings in the mortuary cult requires two parties: the living and the dead²⁰². The interaction between these two parties is evident in tomb scenes that require input from the living for them to be ‘complete’. The scenes indicate that the tomb visitor holds the role not only of ‘viewer’, but also of ‘doer’.

A living participant might in this way act as a counterpart to the deceased in a reciprocal act of giving and receiving. Robins has also put forward a similar idea: “...the image of the deceased receiving offerings needed to be completed and ‘activated’ by the living performers of the ritual” (2016: 115). She does not elaborate on how the living might have accomplished this, but she appears to be implying that the ritual actions carried out at the focal point in a chapel would fill in what is missing and thereby accomplish the aims of the offering scene.

The numerous depictions of rows of offering bearers and cult participants ‘moving’ in the direction of offering installations and depictions of the deceased, as well as images of the living presenting goods to the deceased, visually guided visitors to do likewise. It is possible that in offering food and drink at an installation – where the deceased is presentified in statue form and/or is perceived as being present at/behind a false door – the living is indeed ‘completing’ the offering scenarios depicted in wall scenes.

A surprising indication that the living must act as counterparts is actually their *absence* from certain scenes, namely those in decorated burial chambers. Some burial chambers contain images similar in theme to those found in the tomb superstructure, such as offering table scenes and offering lists, yet figures of people, and sometimes even animals, are omitted²⁰³. The absence of cult participant depictions in decorated burial chambers suggests that the living were required to ‘fill in’ for the absent parties. These scenes do not strictly play an ‘action guiding’ function, as the living would not be able to access this area after the funeral. However, when considered in light of the close relationship between the living and dead

²⁰² For the involvement of the king and gods in private mortuary cults, see **Chapters 5 and 7**.

²⁰³ It should be noted that some Old Kingdom decorated burial chambers do depict human figures (see Kanawati 2005: 58 for three examples from Giza), but it seems that, over time, human figures were consciously left out of the decoration; this includes anthropomorphic hieroglyphs, which were avoided or truncated, as well as the hieroglyphic determinatives of the gods’ names Anubis and Osiris, which were avoided or the names replaced with epithets (ibid. 60 *et passim*). Kanawati notes that the decoration of burial chambers, like that of chapels, is often incomplete. He argues that this might have been purposeful “for magical or superstitious reasons aimed at delaying the possible day of death” (2005: 55). Similarly, Bolshakov suggests that the depiction of Ankhmahor was omitted from his burial chamber as it was considered “dangerous” (1994: 17). The same explanation of ‘superstition’ is given by some scholars for the omission of Ankhmahor from his burial chamber (for references, see Vischak 2003: 140, footnote 22). Vischak proposes a cosmological reason for his absence linked to his passivity prior to being resurrected (ibid. 140-46).

outlined above – especially regarding the giving and receiving of offerings – they do reiterate the need for living participants in performing cult actions in the superstructure.

Decorated burial chambers are attested from the 5th Dynasty, including at Saqqara (Bolshakov 1994: 17; Kanawati 2005: 55-57). While more than 120 examples of Old Kingdom decorated burial chambers are known to exist in Egypt, few are well published, and hence a detailed study of this type of burial chamber is lacking (see János and Vymazalová 2018: 215-16). Among my selected tombs, those of Ankhmahor, Mereruka, and Ihy/Idut have decorated burial chambers²⁰⁴.

While the burial chambers of Mereruka and Ihy/Idut do not include an offering table scene, they do feature numerous depictions of offerings; Mereruka's also includes a *ḥtp-dī-nīswt* formula and an offering list (without human determinatives). The burial chamber of Ankhmahor does contain an offering table scene – one that clearly implies the need for action from the living to complete it (**Figure 6.12**).

Image of offering table scene removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Kanawati and Hassan 1997.

Figure 6.12: Offering table scene with vacant chair. Ankhmahor's burial chamber, north wall.
Source: Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pl. 28a, after Firth and Gunn 1926: pl. 6.

The offering table scene in Ankhmahor's burial chamber omits the tomb owner, but a vacant chair is situated in front of an offering table. Ankhmahor is not entirely absent – his name and titles, inscribed above the chair, make him manifest, and his body itself would be present in the sarcophagus in the chamber²⁰⁵. There are no images of other humans, or even living

²⁰⁴ For a list of decorated burial chambers at Saqqara up until 2005, see Dawood 2005.

²⁰⁵ Vischak similarly suggests that the presence of the deceased's body makes "any actual images of the tomb owner superfluous" (2003: 140). For Bolshakov, the empty chair is an example of what he terms 'hinting': the presence of the tomb owner at the offering table is only alluded to (1994: 17-20).

animals²⁰⁶. Likewise, the offering list on the east wall does not feature anthropomorphic determinatives. Written in front of the chair is ‘place offerings’ (*imi hnk*) (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 62). This is intriguing because it was not intended that the living would enter this space subsequent to the funeral. To whom was the command addressed in the absence of cult participants, whether physically present or depicted in images?

While the caption could perhaps refer to a ritual carried out during the funeral itself when the burial chamber was still open, I suggest another interpretation based on the notional connection between the burial chamber, the false door, and serdab (see Bárta 2005a; 2011: 249-51, Nyord 2013a: 198). The idea that a notional connection existed between the false door and burial chamber is supported by features in Inti’s 6th Dynasty tomb at Abusir South.

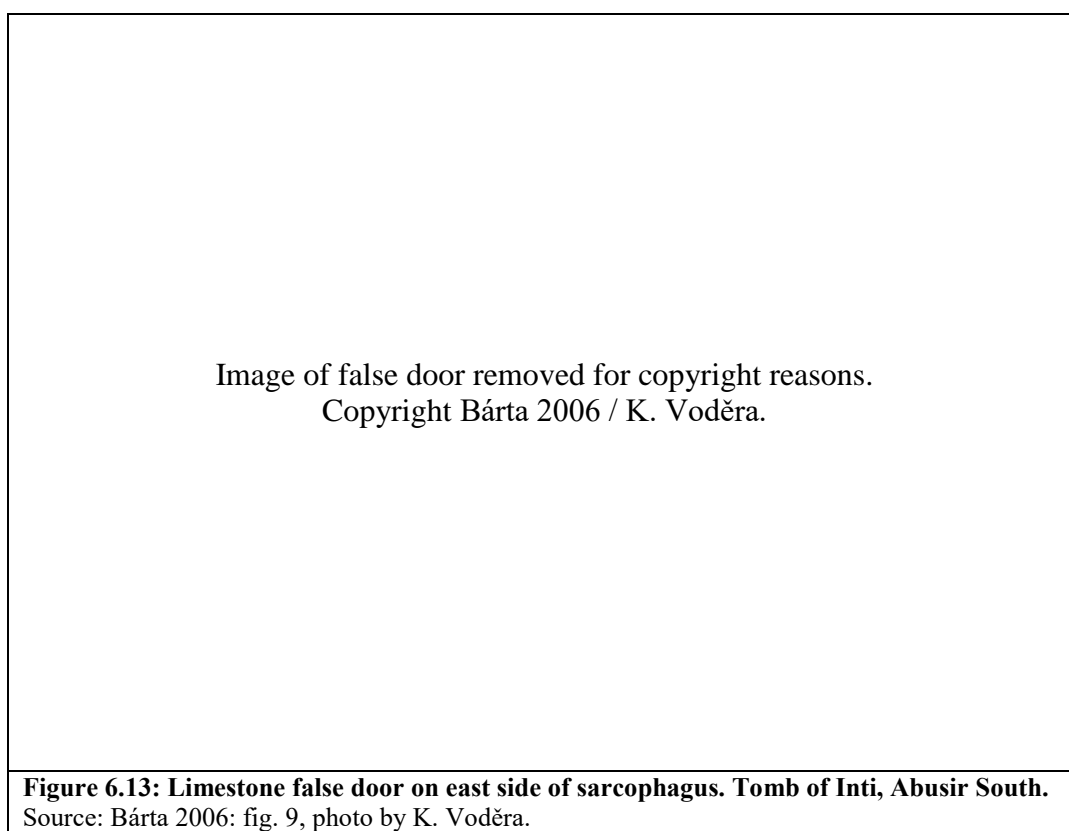


Figure 6.13: Limestone false door on east side of sarcophagus. Tomb of Inti, Abusir South.
Source: Bárta 2006: fig. 9, photo by K. Voděra.

A carved limestone door was found positioned against Inti’s sarcophagus (**Figure 6.13**) – its inscriptions include a *hṭp-di-niswt* formula and offerings, but like Ankhmahor’s burial chamber, no human figures are present here or on other surfaces (Bárta 2006: 56). Originally, access to the burial shaft and chamber was given via a door in the south wall of the tomb’s courtyard, which itself has a false door on its west wall; and on the burial shaft’s west wall, there was found a “double-recessed, white plastered niche situated on

²⁰⁶ As Kanawati notes, a similar situation occurs in the burial chamber of Remni’s tomb (from Saqqara, but not in my selection), but regarding scenes of the transport of offerings by boat on the east wall and images of offerings on the south wall (2009: 37-38; pls. 38a-b, 52a-b). No human figures are present in these scenes, but the tomb owner’s name and titles are depicted above each boat (ibid. 38).

approximately the same level as the door connecting the shaft with the court...” (Bárta 2005a: 1-2). Bárta suggests that the various doors are intended to facilitate the movement of the deceased between the burial chamber and the offering point in the courtyard (ibid. 4-5; 2003: 21-22; 2011: 249-51)²⁰⁷. They at least notionally link the burial chamber and offering places.

Due to this connection between offering points and the burial chamber, I propose that the caption in Ankhmahor’s burial chamber refers to actions that would be carried out by living participants in the superstructure of the tomb. Although the living would not see this caption after the funeral, it underscores that they were perceived to ‘complete’ the offering scene in the underground burial chamber through such actions. The decorated burial chambers that do not include such offering table scenes may still feature offering lists, image of offerings, and/or *ḥtp-di-ni^{swt}* formulae. These motifs are similar to those found in the superstructure, and are also indicative of the notional link between offering installations in the superstructure and the burial chamber, albeit in a less direct way.

Therefore, rather than interpreting depictions of food and drink in the superstructure and substructure as ‘magically’ manifesting nourishment for the deceased of their own accord, we can instead consider their relation to the living, whose input was required for the functioning of the cult and the ongoing sustenance of the tomb owner.

6.iv Moving through, and acting in, the superstructure

In light of the foregoing sections, here I contextualise the activity of the living in the tomb space. I suggest that movement through, and action in, the superstructure of a tomb was an important performative and social act that the living carried out – it *actualised* the depicted activity of the cult participant figures. As such, it constituted an enactment of the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead: the former are ‘playing their part’.

Movement through space, and action carried out there, is an important consideration in architecture, both ancient and modern. Lynn, in his publication that challenges static forms in modern architectural design and instead promotes mutable, dynamic ones, observes that it

²⁰⁷ I suggest in **Chapter 8** that white coating on particular tomb features facilitated such movement. Bárta does not mention whether Inti’s door features any white coating.

is phenomenology that reintroduces motion and time to architecture²⁰⁸, which is “conventionally conceived in a dimensional space of idealized stasis” (1999: 11, 34)²⁰⁹.

Several studies investigate aspects of physical movement through Egyptian architecture, particularly as related to temple ritual (see Accetta 2016: 33). Accetta’s study (2016), which includes the role of decoration in implying movement through temples, supports propositions by Spence (1998) and Wilkinson (1994a: 60-73; 1994b; 1995a; 1995b) that symbols within the decorative programmes of temples and tombs can (re)-orientate the structures symbolically. Although Accetta, Spence, and Wilkinson focus on New Kingdom architecture, some of their findings are relevant to my study: in particular, that images can play an active role in shaping space and guide people’s paths of movement through space; and that movement through a structure can ‘animate’ that space (Accetta 2016: 303-304; Spence 1998: 105, 196).

For example, the animation of New Kingdom temple space involves the king moving through a ritual setting – the temple structure that represents the cosmos – bringing him into association with the sun by analogous movement (Spence 1998: 196). When the temple was not in use, the king’s association with the sun was maintained through implied ritual movement, established through the structure’s actual or symbolic orientation (the latter being achieved through decorative elements) (ibid. 202). In light of these studies, we might consider the movement of visitors through the tomb as animating the space. Although an Old Kingdom tomb does not have the same cosmological significance as a New Kingdom temple, the motion of visitors through the space can nonetheless be ritually significant.

While I argue that the activation of offering modes was effected through ritual actions involving the harnessing of magic (see **Chapter 8**) and not by visitors moving through the tomb space, I propose that should visitors emulate the figures, they would not merely be mirroring the depicted movement and actions, but actualising them. Likewise, if the living enacted the offering rituals depicted on the walls, they would actualise these. Robins presents not only an overly simplistic interpretation, but also an inverted one, when she writes that the depicted figures “mirrored the actions of the living priests and relatives who

²⁰⁸ See further Lynn 1999: 32-34 for the broader context of this remark – a discussion of the difference between a discrete/repetitive series and a continuous/iterative series when studying geometric form, and time and motion, as related to architecture.

²⁰⁹ Lynn notes that architects, by tradition of the discipline, design structures with timelessness and permanence in mind; he advocates the development of architectural techniques that allow for obsolescence, recycling, ruin, and abandonment (ibid. 9, 13). In light of Lynn’s work, it would be interesting to consider how the trajectory of a tomb’s usage – as envisaged by the Egyptians – might inform its decoration, as although tombs are often characterised in literature as permanent dwellings for the deceased, they were in many cases adapted, re-used, or usurped by other occupants (see Harrington 2013: 133-37; Meskell 2004: 62-66).

came to perform the ritual” (2016: 116). Bolshakov makes a similar remark when observing that processions of offering bearers are depicted as heading from the tomb entrance to their “final destination” of the false door²¹⁰: “The same way was followed by actual visitors to the tomb (there was simply no other route), and, thus, the murals are exactly reproducing their activities” (1997: 90). Depictions of figures on the walls, although presenting an illusion of movement and action, are still static in reality. Tomb visitors would not be copying the poses of these figures, as if models in *tableaux vivants*²¹¹, but would actually be enacting the represented motions and actions.

Where tomb superstructures are both highly decorated and complex, a visitor could take numerous paths through a tomb (contra to Bolshakov’s statement), and images of offering bearers moving as if towards the offering point(s) could assist with way-finding. However, there is sometimes a hiatus in decoration, such as in the case of the undecorated pillared hall and subsidiary rooms in Akhethotep and Ptahhotep’s tomb – the hall or northernmost rooms would need to be navigated in order to reach the chapel of Akhethotep, yet there are no figures to point the way. Regarding way-finding, the issue of familiarity – both with an individual tomb and with tomb decorative programmes in general – should be acknowledged. If participants or visitors were using a tomb frequently to perform the cult, directions might be unnecessary. It could also be argued that a level of cultural familiarity would preclude a need for guiding functions. Nevertheless, the variation among individual tombs should not be overlooked and, moreover, familiarity with the types of decoration within tombs might in actuality prompt the visitors to seek out visual cues to direct them to the main offering points.

As evident from the previous chapters, reciprocity is a crucial element underpinning the mortuary cult; participation occurs with a view to reaping future benefits. Indeed, the tomb is a place in which multiple times and states of being come together (Nyord 2013a). It is not a passive structure, but an active or generative one in which relations are materialised and enacted across time horizons. There is a collapsing of time, and subject and object: cult participants would be carrying out the action that is depicted on the tomb walls as if already

²¹⁰ Although the focus of Bolshakov’s 1997 publication is the *ka* concept in Old Kingdom Egypt, his study includes a systematization and analysis of tomb decorative programmes (see *ibid.* 40-49). He examines the orientation of rows of offering bearers in a selection of Giza and Saqqara tombs, including in relation to depictions of the tomb owner receiving offerings (*ibid.* 89-92). Bolshakov’s study does not include all of my selected core tombs: only those of Ankhmahor, Ihy/Idut, Mereruka, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, and Ty.

²¹¹ For a discussion of *tableaux vivants* in reference to ‘image acts’ and the empowered image, see Bredekamp 2018: 77-98.

accomplished, although at the time of the tomb's decoration the action had not yet happened (see Meskell 2004: 60; Nyord 2013a: 197).

Bell's model of ritual practice theory supports an interpretation of the tomb site, as well as the ritual activity carried out there, as active rather than passive. Bell's theory proposes that ritual is part of a process of social reproduction: it is generative, rather than reflective, of social structure and relationships (Bell 1992: Part III; Bourdieu 1977: 118-20; Nilsson Stutz 2015: 1-2, 6; see also Stevenson 2013: 13-18). The model emphasises embodied practice, suggesting that the enacting of rituals creates a structured world and gives the participants a sense of structure (Nilsson Stutz 2015: 6). Therefore, both the motions and actions of tomb visitors are creating space, rituals, and social relationships in an ongoing manner.

By actualising the movements and actions of the depicted cult participants and offering bearers, tomb visitors would themselves become members of those groups. Visitors are thus fulfilling key purposes of the tomb: a site for the remembrance of the deceased and the maintenance of their social identity, and for the sustenance of their post-mortem existence through the performance of the cult. Remembering can take place through bodily movement and performance (Meskell 2004: 65-66)²¹². Similarly, the sustenance of the dead seems to be contingent upon the performative elements of movement, as well as those of gesture and voice, as raised previously (**Section 4.ii**).

Depicted movements and actions are being actualised, experienced, and also possibly renegotiated over time – each time a ritual is conducted there is an opportunity for reproduction or change (ibid.) Additionally, as an individual moves through the tomb, viewing and echoing the images depicting groups of offerings bearers and cult participants, they might gain a feeling of social cohesion, as if they are becoming part of the depicted group through their own participation. The cult was performed in part to promote connection among the living kin and provide them with a location in which they can maintain contact with deceased relatives (Moreno García 2010: 152; Robins 2016: 125).

6.v Conclusion

Guiding functions of internal decoration concern both the movement and actions of tomb visitors, who were potential cult participants. Images of people transporting and presenting offerings to the deceased are oriented toward the offering point(s), and when such depictions are found outside the chapel, they are oriented toward it. These images could guide visitors

²¹² Meskell differentiates between commemoration and social memory as short term (a few generations) and long term, respectively (2004: 66).

towards offering places, particularly if they were not already familiar with the tomb's layout and/or if the tomb comprised many chambers.

Figures of offering bearers and cult participants can provide an impression of motion to viewers via broken symmetry and, more rarely, forward lean. Regarding the former, while figures can be arranged symmetrically to 'frame' a particularly salient feature, it is the slight variations among the figures that imply motion and hence draw the eye toward that feature. Regarding the latter, even when the leaning forward of figures might be related to particular offering gestures, rather than to forward motion, it still implies dynamic actions, and ones that visitors may actualise.

Action guiding is achieved through the presence of depictions that indicate the types of actions that visitors should carry out in relation to offerings; these images are often juxtaposed with offering lists and offering points. It is also achieved via the repetition of particularly salient offering motifs, such as that of the tomb owner seated at the offering table. These motifs, repeated (albeit with some variation) even within single-roomed chapels, reinforce one another through proximity and similarity in design, and reinforce to the viewer where and/or how to make offerings, as well as the types of offerings to give.

The requirement for the living to participate in the cult is underscored by the conspicuous absence of representations of cult participants in offering-related scenes in decorated burial chambers. Visitors would not be able to access the burial chamber and see these images and so they do not play a direct action guiding role. However, the notional connection between the offering points above ground and the burial chamber below ground allowed the actions carried out at the former to be effective in the latter.

The notion of reciprocity provides the crucial impetus for tomb visitors to carry out the desired actions: to follow the orientation of the representations of offering bearers and cult participants through the tomb space towards the offering points; and to actualise their presentation of provisions to the deceased, who is depicted as the recipient and the other party in the relationship. Another social factor is that of communal belonging. Visitors become part of a group by emulating the movement and actions of the depicted cult participants, and by actively 'completing' offering scenes, which require their input.

Chapter 7. The deployment of communicative modes to facilitate cult participation

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the various communicative modes (image, text, object, voice, and gesture), including certain visual devices related to the modes of image and text (symmetry, implied motion, and framing), in relation to the provision of sustenance for the dead.

This chapter explicates the notion of ‘modal affordances’, drawn from the field of multimodal social semiotics, and uses illustrative examples from the tombs to demonstrate how the particular modes were utilised. I show that modes were employed in combinations (multimodal communications) to effectively impart messages to the living about how to provision the dead, which underlines the careful design of the tomb and its decorative programme to target cult participation from the living.

Framing is a particularly noticeable feature in the decoration of the tombs, and here I expand upon the earlier discussions of it. I demonstrate some of the roles that this device played in communicating salient information to potential cult participants. I suggest that particular modes were preferred over others – i.e., that a hierarchy of modes existed. Finally, I discuss the ways in which modes provided opportunities for the living to participate in the cult.

7.i. A multimodal, social semiotic approach

There are various traditions via which multimodality has been, or can be, approached; one of which is social semiotics (see Jewitt, Bezemer, and O’Halloran 2016: ix-x, 1-5, 58-85). The key proponents of adopting a social semiotic approach to study the ways in which humans create and communicate meaning include Kress and Van Leeuwen, whose studies I draw upon. A social semiotic approach is so named, according to Kress, because, “Meaning arises in social environments and in social interactions... In the theory here, ‘the social’ is generative of meaning, of semiotic processes and forms, hence the theory is a *social-semiotic one*” (2010: 54, italics in original). Therefore, in discussing the choices and uses of communicative modes within the offering cult, I have been considering the parties involved. I have focused on the role of the living as participants in the cult, as an ‘audience’ for the images, texts, and objects within the tomb complex, and as the ones to enact gestures, recitations, movement, and actions there.

A semiotic approach has been used by Lipson (2003) to examine a small selection of public monuments from different time periods in Ancient Egypt, focusing on the interplay between text and image to convey meaning. However, Lipson does not use a *social semiotic* approach, instead following Horn’s work on ‘visual language’, which treats visual

communication (text and image) as analysable in the same way as a language system (ibid. 90-91; Horn 1998). This contrasts with the approaches of Kress and Van Leeuwen that I draw upon (see Kress 2010: 6-8; Van Leeuwen 2005: xi, 3-4). Although Lipson highlights the importance of multimodal communication in Ancient Egypt and the multiple meanings that it can convey, she does not fully consider the wider context – locational or social – of her selected texts, address issues of literacy, or modes beyond that of text and image.

Modes are various resources used by humans for meaning-making and communication, and a plethora of modes exist, such as verbal, written, visual (imagery), gestural, and musical modes, among others; they can be produced physiologically with the body or made technologically (Van Leeuwen 2005: 285). Both Kress and Van Leeuwen utilise the terms ‘semiotic resources’ and ‘semiotic modes’ almost interchangeably. Kress summarises ‘mode’ as “a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for meaning making”, but highlights the difficulties in creating a precise definition (Kress 2010: 79, 84-88)²¹³. Both Kress and Van Leeuwen favour the term ‘semiotic resources’ to describe the various means available for communication over other terms, such as ‘signs’ or ‘grammar’, that impart a sense of rigidity, strict rules, or pre-determined functions (Kress 2010: 6-8; Van Leeuwen 2005: xi, 3-4)²¹⁴.

I retain the term ‘mode’ in my study, as Kress and Van Leeuwen do, for two reasons. Firstly, it is a widely used term in the field of social semiotics. Secondly, my view is that switching to the term ‘resource’ would only serve to circumvent any future attempts to tackle the problems in defining what the separate modes are and how they are used, particularly within a given society (here, the Ancient Egyptian one)²¹⁵. As Kress notes, the thorny question of what a ‘mode’ is and how it behaves is as much a social one as a semiotic one (2010: 84-88).

An exhaustive exploration of all salient modes that are employed in engendering, encouraging, or manifesting offerings within my selection of tombs would be impossible within the confines of this study; it is also unnecessary as through the discussion of illustrative examples, I can shed light on how modes are employed together to convey important information to cult participants and tomb visitors. While I do not address whether my selected modes were perceived as entirely separate ones by the Egyptians, I do examine

²¹³ Kress differentiates between the terms ‘mode’ and ‘medium’ as follows: “I use the term ‘mode’ for the culturally and socially produced resources for representation and ‘medium’ as the term for the culturally produced means for distribution of these representations-as-meanings, that is, as messages” (2005: 6-7).

²¹⁴ Being socially constructed, resources are constantly remade according to need and occasion, yet retain a degree of stability due to social conventions (Kress 2010: 6-8).

²¹⁵ Kress highlights that not all societies necessarily perceive certain resources as salient modes: for example, the layout of a page, or the typeface of a text (2010: 86-92). It is beyond the remit of the current study to assess the salient modes in Old Kingdom Egypt versus other time periods in Egypt, or indeed other societies.

the modes in light of their employment together (multimodally) in communicating information regarding offerings in the mortuary cult.

Van Leeuwen's social semiotic analysis comprises four aspects: discourse²¹⁶; genre²¹⁷; style²¹⁸; and modality²¹⁹ (2005: 91 *et passim*, see also the glossary). In contrast, Kress does not clearly define his approach and it appears more exploratory and unstructured. Kress uses a large number of different terms – among which is *affordance* – and while he explains these during his narrative, he neglects to provide a glossary. His approach is more wide-ranging, yet far less clearly defined than that of Van Leeuwen. Kress and Van Leeuwen have collaborated frequently and authored joint publications (cf. 2001; 2002; 2006); they reference each other's work (for example Kress 2010: 54; Van Leeuwen 2005: xi). Their approaches overlap and hence I draw upon both without issues of contradiction.

Although both scholars focus on contemporary communication in an increasingly digital world, their work in the fields of social semiotics and multimodality provides an in-road to examining the use of modes in Ancient Egypt. It is particularly useful for investigating the communication of sustenance in the mortuary cult because it accommodates the physical and performative components of ritual, including gesture, recitation, and (inter)actions with objects, images, and texts. It does not solely consider language as a means of communication and, as mentioned above, it even permits the analysis of elements such as colour, visual layout, and font/typeface²²⁰. Further, social semiotics lends itself to my 'thought experiments' approach, particularly because it is necessarily interdisciplinary, and as I am applying it to the single phenomenon of the mortuary cult. As Van Leeuwen succinctly explains, "Social semiotics is not 'pure' theory, not a self-contained field. It only comes into its own when it is applied to specific instances and specific problems, and it always requires immersing oneself not just in semiotic concepts and methods as such but also in some other

²¹⁶ The 'what' of communication and its content. Van Leeuwen draws on the work of Foucault (for example 1977) in defining discourses as "socially constructed knowledges of some aspect of reality" (2005: 94).

²¹⁷ Van Leeuwen provides an apt example of genre in social semiotics: "The genre of advertisement is defined by its function of selling products or services – and, today, increasingly, ideas... Combinations are possible too. The genre of magazine advertisement, for instance, is defined on the basis of its function – advertising – as well as its medium – the magazine" (2005: 123). The genre that I explore in this study is that of the mortuary cult, as the function of communication that I am examining is that of providing sustenance for the deceased.

²¹⁸ How individual or social identity is expressed. The issue of 'style' in tomb design and decorative programs (whether of an individual, a social group, or a specific site or time period) is beyond the scope of my study, but see for example Vischak 2006.

²¹⁹ The use of semiotic resources to express the extent to which a representation or statement should be taken as 'true'.

²²⁰ Regarding Egyptian texts, 'palaeography' is a more fitting term than 'font' or 'typeface', yet elements such as text size, spacing, and style could still be considered. It should be noted that social semiotic analysis is so far-reaching that it may also include modes such as scent and dress (see for example Van Leeuwen 2005: 51-52, 58-61, 122, 144-49).

field... Social semiotics is a form of enquiry. It does not offer ready-made answers. It offers ideas for formulating questions and ways of searching for answers” (2005: 1).

Introducing modal affordances

A vast array of aspects may be analysed using a multimodal, social semiotic approach, each with their own terms²²¹: for the analyst, such a wide reach is a blessing on the one hand and a curse on the other. Due to the constraints of this study, I have had to select not only certain modes (as outlined previously), but also a certain aspect to focus on, namely modal affordance. However, I will also touch upon other aspects used in multimodal, social semiotics that are relevant to the discussion of affordance – these will be elaborated upon as they arise in the discussion.

I defined the term ‘affordance’, which originates from Gibson’s 1979 work, in **Section 5.i**, where I focused on the *physical* affordances of offering cult installations and architectural features of tombs. This chapter primarily concerns *modal affordances*, but takes into account my findings from **Chapter 5** regarding physical affordances. While the two concepts are closely linked, physical affordances centre on the potential practical, bodily uses of a mode, whereas modal affordances relate more specifically to what it is about a particular mode that allows certain meanings or information to be communicated to a recipient. A multimodal, social semiotic approach may consider both physical and semiotic affordances²²². An examination of both visual and sensorial aspects of offering areas, i.e. combining semiotics and physical affordances, addresses the ways in which participants are elicited and enabled to make offerings in the tomb more holistically.

The term ‘affordance’ covers not only the uses and meanings (of an object, image, etc.) that are already present, but also those that are latent. However, certain rules to regulate the use and meaning of semiotic modes may exist within a society – more so in certain domains of application than others (Van Leeuwen 2005: 4-5, 273)²²³. While Kress does not provide a glossary as Van Leeuwen does, Kress points to the latter’s approach to social semiotics and I am working on the assumption that this includes the associated terminology and definitions

²²¹ The glossary that Van Leeuwen provides contains nearly 150 different terms, albeit with some describing the same principle (2005: 273-88).

²²² See for example the case study of smartphones in Kress 2010: 184-97.

²²³ Such a set of rules that govern the use and meaning of communicative modes in Ancient Egypt can be seen in the principles of the artistic ‘canon’ (see Davis 1989; Robins 1994; Schäfer 1986 [1974]) and the notion of ‘decorum’ (Baines 2007: 14-29). However, despite a level of regulation, there was a degree of flexibility in iconography and visual programs (such as tomb decoration) and a plurality of potential meanings in it (see Vischak 2006: 256-58; van Walsem 1998; 2005; 2006).

(2010: 54). Kress' application and understanding of 'modal affordance' seems congruent with that of Van Leeuwen (see *ibid.* 82).

An area of disagreement between the fields of phenomenology (from which the concept of physical affordances derives) and semiotics (from which the concept of modal affordances derives) is that of sensory perception and how humans take on board different types or modes of information. Firstly, semiotics is dependent on the division of human perception into the five senses, which is a modern, western construction (Pink 2011). The question of the Egyptian conceptualisation of the senses is not addressed in this study. Secondly, Kress makes a firm distinction between writing and images, and how they communicate²²⁴ (Pink 2011: 264, 267-68, citing Kress 2005). The close relationship between image and text will be considered in my study, especially given the pictorial nature of Egyptian hieroglyphs, yet I cannot hope to resolve the conflict between the fields of phenomenology and semiotics.

7.ii. Modal affordances and the living

The question of *audience* has been raised in the preceding chapters when discussing the use of images and texts to guide cult participants to offering areas within the tombs and elicit offering-related actions from them. It is not only the choice of modes that are vital in a communication act, but also the circumstances (when and where), and the actors involved (who) (Van Leeuwen 2005: 123). These elements are all crucial to the mortuary cult: in terms of *when*, offering lists denote the ideal occasions at which offerings are to be presented; regarding *where*, it is clear that the ongoing offering cult is situational, i.e. performed at the tomb complex in designated offering areas and/or at the entrance; the *who* comprises priests, family members, dependents, and tomb visitors making offerings, as well as the king and gods, who permit offerings to come forth (see further **Section 8.iv**). I would add to this the *how* of offerings, that is, not just the choice of modes, but the actions carried out with them.

Multiple modes have been selected to be used in the tomb, either by the tomb owner or by those acting on their behalf. I maintain the stance that I have taken in previous chapters, namely that the tomb was purposefully designed to be used by the living as well as the dead²²⁵. The living could present perishable offerings and, later in this chapter, I propose that these were perhaps more desirable to the dead than imperishable ones. With reference to

²²⁴ Kress' approach to the meanings that text and image afford contrasts with that of Ingold, for example (Pink 2011: 267-68, citing both Prior's 2005 critique of Kress, and Ingold 2000: 166).

²²⁵ The notion of design is addressed by Kress' multimodal, social semiotic approach to communication – see for example 2010: 22-23, 26-27.

tomb design being targeted towards the living, I will now revisit a selection of the offering installations and features covered in previous chapters, adding a consideration of their modal affordances to their aforementioned physical affordances.

The architectural and interior design of a structure communicates particular messages and fashions certain movement patterns; it involves a multifaceted visual language (Kress 2010: 110-13; Van Leeuwen 2005: 69-74). In **Chapters 4 and 6**, I demonstrated that the mode of imagery could play complex roles such as ‘signalling’ and ‘guiding’, while texts including appeals to the living and offering lists would indicate to literate visitors that certain modes can manifest offerings, and give limited directions as to how to carry out ritual actions. Additionally, I have already explored how text, image, and object presentified the deceased in the tomb. **Chapter 5**, which focused on physical affordances, argued that tomb design facilitates particular offering-related actions, for example through the use of steps to structure the approach to the offering area, or via the provision of surfaces for placing food or objects and surfaces for libations.

As mentioned in **Chapter 5** regarding physical affordances, statues were a focus for ritual action, and their combination with basins and offering tables afforded the placement of food and drink offerings. Statues were often located within niches, some of which possibly had doors; this would have enabled a concealing and revealing of the image of the deceased. It is the 3D nature of statues²²⁶ that permits these actions – while food or drink, or an object, could be presented to a 2D image or a relief, it cannot physically receive the offering in quite the same way. While the physicality of statues brings to mind physical affordances in the first instance, modal affordances can also be considered because there are certain types of information that only a statue (as opposed to a 2D or relief image, text, gesture, etc.) can communicate to the viewer.

An engaged statue or one in the round affords the communication of corporeal presence, by virtue of its roundness, more so than a relief or 2D image. A statue impresses upon its viewer a *body with volume*, beyond even that of a raised or sunken relief. Additionally, as outlined in **Chapter 3**, a reciprocal relationship was enacted between the living and the dead through the shared gaze, which was significant in manifesting the tomb owner’s presence in the tomb (Nyord 2014: 32). I highlighted in **Section 5.ii** the affordance that a statue has to share a

²²⁶ But cf. Davis regarding the design and carving of Egyptian statuary as ultimately based on planar section contours, being carved “von aussen heran” rather than “von innen heraus”, and thus never conceived of in a fully three-dimensional manner (1989: 15-18, using German phraseology from Hamann 1908). See also Baines’ discussion of Schäfer’s ‘rule of directional straightness’ (2007: 221-27, citing Schäfer 1986 [1974]).

face-on gaze with the viewer – something that a relief or 2D image cannot typically do due to the principles of Egyptian art.

Here I will expand upon the notion of ‘framing’, but from a social semiotic angle, as it is pertinent to statuary and indeed to the other tomb features that I have discussed²²⁷. Renfrew’s indicators of ritual activity (introduced in **Section 3.i**) may be addressed through a multimodal, social semiotic lens: essentially they describe specific ways in which the message ‘this is a space in which ritual action was/is to be carried out’ may be communicated to the archaeologist, or original participants in said action. Among Renfrew’s indicators are attention-focusing features of a ritual space (1994: 51, citing Renfrew and Bahn 1991: 359-60). Within social semiotics, the term ‘framing’ denotes devices that are used to focus a viewer’s or reader’s attention.

Frames are vital for meaning-making in all modes, as they delimit the spatial and/or temporal bounds and reach of an image, a text, or other semiotic entity: because a frame indicates what is to be considered as a coherent unity, it enables unities to be related to one another in interpretation (Kress 2010: 149). Framing can therefore create a sense of discontinuity and thus separateness or contrast, or continuity and thus similarity and connectedness, between elements of a composition²²⁸; for example, by including or excluding empty spaces or frame lines (Van Leeuwen 2005: 7, 277). A photographer chooses what to include and exclude in a photograph and how to utilise space around their subject, and may employ these to draw the viewer’s eye to a particular focal point (see Kress 2010: 149-150, and colour pls. 14-15). As frames can separate or include information, they work alongside modes and provide clues about what is considered salient in a situation by the designer or message-maker²²⁹.

Symmetry is an aspect of framing and of an overall visual ‘composition’ – a composition, in social semiotic terms, is an arrangement of elements within a space, and is based on the human sense of ‘balance’ (Van Leeuwen 2005: 198). The balance of a composition is created through the ‘visual weight’ accorded to the elements within it, with this visual weight deriving from their perceptual salience (ibid.) As Van Leeuwen explains, elements can seem ‘heavier’ if, for example, shifted away from the composition’s centre and

²²⁷ I discuss here frames on a flat plain; I do not consider the aspect of depth that can be achieved through employing raised and sunken relief in Ancient Egypt.

²²⁸ According to Van Leeuwen’s approach, framing is one of three aspects of ‘composition’, the other two being ‘information value’ and ‘salience’; composition is “the fundamental cohesive principle of space-based texts and semiotic artefacts and arrangements, the counterpart of rhythm in time-based texts” (2005: 274).

²²⁹ For a detailed analysis of the different effects and degrees of framing, see Van Leeuwen 2005: 6-25.

removing symmetry; and are more salient if depicted in high contrast, detail, or sharpness, or are foregrounded (ibid.)

Chapter 6 included examples of breakages in symmetry employed to create a sense of movement in human figures. Although figures on either side of a salient feature – such as those framing the serdab squint in Ty’s tomb – may appear symmetrical in their placement, scale, and attitude, on closer inspection they are often non-identical and thus asymmetrical. As I noted in that chapter, both symmetry and asymmetry are utilised in tomb decoration to lead the eye: symmetry in the placement and initial appearance of images either side of a feature can ‘frame’ it, while small variations in those images cause the eye to travel in a relevant direction.

The niches in which statues sit are a form of framing: they mark out the image and serve to draw visual attention to it. Niches can be outlined by elements such as torus mouldings, cornices, and texts. Mereruka’s statue niche (**Figures 7.1a-b**) likely featured a lintel and cavetto cornice, and perhaps also wooden doors, as mentioned in **Section 5.ii**.

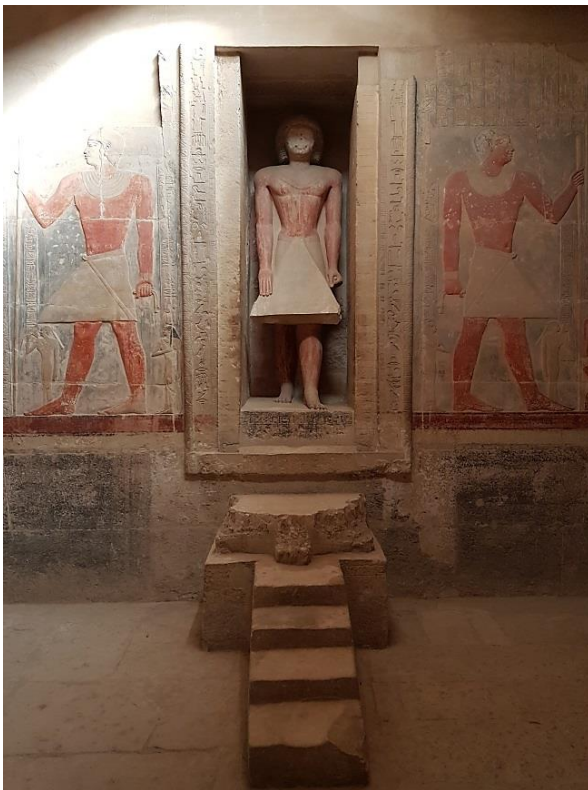


Figure 7.1a: Statue of Mereruka in framed niche, with flanking images and stepped offering table. Source: Author’s photograph.

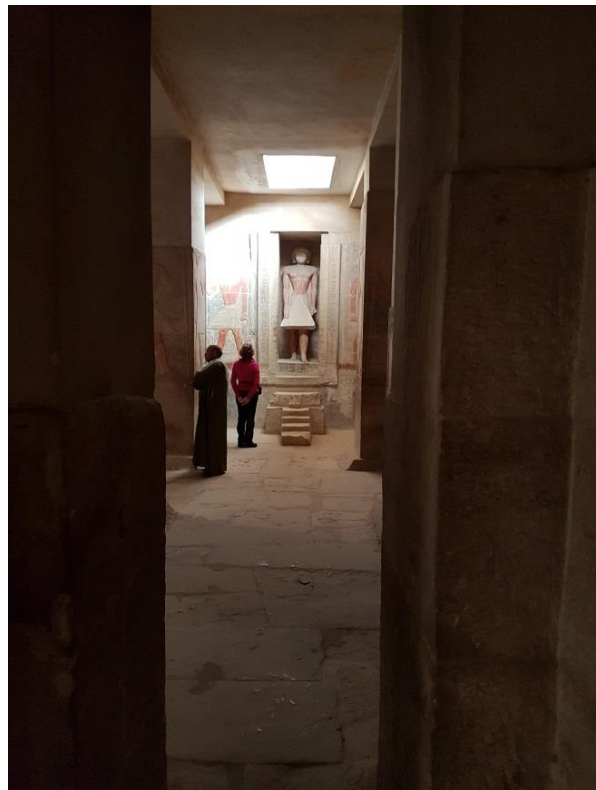


Figure 7.1b: Approach to Mereruka’s statue from room A11. The line of sight to the statue is evident. Source: Author’s photograph.

Mereruka's statue is framed by texts, giving his name and titles, on the left and right outer edges of the niche, as well as on the pedestal beneath. The set of steps leads the eye up to both the offering table and the statue of Mereruka. The visual impact of the corporeality of the 'emerging' statue, the central set of steps, and the overall framing effect is particularly noticeable when entering this area from room A11, as this approach places the ensemble in the visitor's sightline (**Figure 7.1b**). There is an overall symmetry to the composition, save for the striding leg of Mereruka's statue, which lends a sense of movement to his figure.

The striding figures on either side of the statue are arranged symmetrically and also act as a framing device. Even though they face away from the statue, perhaps leading to the assumption that they are not drawing the eye towards it²³⁰, they too depict Mereruka and add to the allusion of his 'striding out' towards the viewer. They are depicted on the same scale as the statue and are therefore congruent with it, giving an impression of Mereruka as viewed from different sides, while the subsidiary figures (his wife and mother) are much smaller. Despite the frame around the statue, the pedestal on which it sits is contiguous with the groundlines on which the striding figures stand, so the images are visually segregated, but not completely separate²³¹. They also all have the quality of colour in common – Mereruka's body, kilt, and hair are the same on the statue and the figures, even though his hairstyle varies slightly – and this gives the impression of continuity²³².

The sum total of all of these features is a complex communication: the tomb owner is presentified in the space, can meet the viewer's gaze, and is striding as if in motion; his corporeality is highlighted by a framed 3D statue that incorporates texts giving his name and titles; supplemental striding images flank the statue, which is to be approached from the front; offerings are to be placed on the offering table, which is in the form of the *hṭp* motif and is to be reached at his feet by way of the steps. There are also important messages being conveyed about his social status. The overall visual combination illustrates that the tomb owner and/or his family had the resources to commission such an elaborate statue and associated decorative programme; his dress, accessories, and titles provide further information about his social standing and official roles in life, and perhaps help to validate to

²³⁰ Roeten's argument that the figures on the western walls of Giza tombs are not used in order to focus the attention of the visitor on the false door stems from whether images of the tomb owner face towards, or away from, the false door (2011: 14-15; 2014: 21-22). He does not take other features, such as framing, into account. Although Mereruka's statue is not a false door, it acts in a similar capacity as an offering point in combination with the offering table.

²³¹ On 'segregation' versus 'separation', see Van Leeuwen 2005: 12.

²³² Van Leeuwen terms a commonality such as this 'rhyme' (2005: 12-13).

visitors and participants the presentation of offerings to him, i.e. eliciting reciprocity. These communications are all part of the wider discourse of the tomb environment.

While the 14 engaged statues in Irukhaptah's tomb do not all depict the tomb owner himself²³³, they nevertheless presentify him and likely a family member or members. The completed statues are framed in niches that were originally painted "mid-blue-grey" (**Figure 7.2c**) (McFarlane 2000: 61); the colour further highlights the statues and creates a sense of depth. The corporeality of the statues gives a visitor to the tomb the impression of being surrounded by people, and these would have to be passed *en route* to the false door. Just as with Mereruka's statue, text is used as a framing device, this time in combination with the piers separating the statues. The texts once again give the tombs owner's name and titles, adding in writing these aspects of his professional identity to his visual representation and manifestation (**Figure 7.2b**). Another band of text, starting at the southern end of the east wall (not pictured), runs horizontally above the statues on the east wall and on to the north wall (not pictured). The text is the *ḥtp-di-nṯwt* formula beginning where there is a now badly damaged image of the tomb owner seated at an offering table. Although the formula is interrupted by a scene in the middle of the east wall (just visible to the far right of **Figure 7.2b**), it continues on the other side (see *ibid.* pl. 41, east wall).

²³³ Of the statues on the north and east walls, nine of the ten are of Irukhaptah; the tenth is unfinished. Of the remaining four on the west wall, three are male and one is female (identities unknown). Two extra statues are drafted on the east wall and three more on the west wall (McFarlane 2000: 60-76).

<p>Image of statue removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2000.</p>	<p>Image of offering bearers removed for copyright reasons. Copyright McFarlane 2000.</p>
<p>Figure 7.2a: Detail of engaged statue (no. 3) on east wall of Irukhaptah's tomb. Source: McFarlane 2000: pl. 26, detail.</p>	<p>Figure 7.2b: Line drawn detail of offering bearers (left side, bottom three registers) facing Irukhaptah's statues on the east wall, north end. Note: statue in niche not drawn. Source: McFarlane 2000: pl. 44, detail.</p>

A particular modal affordance of hieroglyphic writing is noticeable when utilised in framing: it can be arranged vertically or horizontally, and can be oriented to the right or left. This capability can be exploited to lend a sense of symmetry to a composition, and can also draw the eye in a particular direction²³⁴. The use of text orientation for framing is evident, for example, in the placement of text around the statues in Irukhaptah's tomb – not only is there text placed horizontally and vertically, but also there is left and right text orientation of text on the piers. As visible in **Figure 7.2a**, the text to the left of the statue is to be read right to left, while the text to the right of it is to be read in the opposite direction (for the wider visual

²³⁴ For the concept of 'implied motion', which involves the use of 'broken symmetry' (dynamic balance), see **Chapter 5**.

context of this statue on the east wall, see **Figure 7.2c**). Six of the seven piers separating the statues are decorated in pairs with regard to their text orientation; the seventh pillar is undecorated and the statue next to this was left unfinished (McFarlane 2000: 56, 61). The eye is drawn toward the statue itself, as the ‘front’ of the hieroglyphs, where one begins reading, face the statue that they frame²³⁵, although the texts are then read ‘away’ from this starting point. A similar situation is seen in **Figures 7.3a-b**, as the figures of the offering bearers and cult participants face left towards the false door, leading the visitor toward it, and the text on the jambs of the door, the recess, and the adjoining wall (including the offering list), begin from the left edge (nearest the door) and face right. Although the text is read from right to left, the hieroglyphic signs themselves face in the same direction as the figures in the scene.


Text can therefore be used in a manner similar to the ‘guiding’ role outlined in **Chapter 6**. There I demonstrated that offering bearers are depicted as moving towards the offering point within a tomb, i.e. false door, offering table, or even statue (see **Figure 7.2b**, left side of **7.2c**, and **7.3a-b**). I argued that these figures guided visitors to the tomb towards the offering points and also depicted desirable actions, i.e. presenting offerings and carrying out ritual actions. Text can be used to frame an image and to guide the eye of the viewer towards observing it and, in the case of an anthropomorphic image, to share in a mutual gaze. Additional aspects of the person can be represented through text, particularly via inscriptions of their name and professional titles: this might serve to manifest the person more holistically, as their social standing and occupation is being communicated, providing extra information to the viewer that might be harder to impart through images alone.

²³⁵ The tomb of Idu at Giza also features statues in niches with inscribed individual piers; however, the texts on these four piers, as well as the horizontal text above the statues, all face in the same direction (McFarlane 2000: 56, footnote 255, citing Simpson 1976: fig. 36). The very recently discovered 5th Dynasty rock-cut tomb of Wahty at Saqqara (see above, footnote 173) features a very large number of engaged statues. While it is difficult to confirm from the initial photographs, it does seem that some of the statues are separated by piers that bear text oriented symmetrically in pairs.

Image of statues removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Christian Mariais.

Figure 7.2c: Engaged statues on the east wall (northern end) in Irukaptah's tomb, framed by vertical pillars bearing text and a horizontal band of text above their heads. Note: slight distortion at the bottom of the central part of the image is due to two photographs being stitched together.
Source: https://osirisnet.net/mastabas/iroukaptah/e_iroukaptah_02.htm (image cm-61bis).

Framing is clearly a feature of false doors as well as statue niches. Once again, a focal point is created by a physical frame that draws the eye. The door has jambs and a lintel – sometimes multiple sets of them – and may have a cornice. **Chapter 5** has addressed the visual cues that false doors have in order to create the impression of physical affordances: these features identify them as liminal points and thus akin to physically operational doors. As with statues, other features such as offering tables, slabs, or benches can appear in conjunction with them. The physical affordances of these offering installations are combined with the modes of image and text, which may be located on and around them. Together, these all point the viewer towards the offering point, signal that it is a location at which to present offerings, and permit that those offerings be made.

	<p>Image of offering bearers removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003.</p>
<p>Figure 7.3a: Detail of offering bearers and cult participants heading towards the false door (red arrow indicates their orientation). The hieroglyphs of the offering list (top right) also face the door. Room IX, west wall, tomb of Ih/Idut. Source: Author’s photograph.</p>	<p>Figure 7.3b: Line-drawn detail of Figure 7.3a, showing offering bearers on the northern recess of Idut’s false door. Note: Top-most register not shown. Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003: pl. 69b, detail.</p>

It is important to note that framing, as well as being used to draw the eye towards a focal point and particularly salient information, and separate or include information, can be employed in a more porous way. By this, I mean that frames can be intentionally permeated and therefore provide an impression of merging between units. Van Leeuwen refers to this as ‘overlap’ (see 2005: 9-10, 12-13). An example is visible in room A12 of Mereruka’s tomb. This room is decorated with a plethora of offerings and offerors, and adjoins room A11, which contains a false door and the burial shaft. In two comparable scenes on the north and south walls of A12, Mereruka is depicted as seated and receiving offerings from cult participants who stretch their arms through or between blocks of hieroglyphic text that otherwise separate the images of him from those of the offerors (**Figures 7.4a-b**).

<p>Image of Mereruka removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Duell 1938.</p>	<p>Image of Mereruka removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Duell 1938.</p>
<p>Figure 7.4a: Mereruka receiving offerings directly from an offeror, through blocks of text. Room A12, north wall, detail. Source: Duell 1938 vol. II, pl. 113.</p>	<p>Figure 7.4b: Mereruka receiving offerings directly from an offeror, through blocks of text. Room A12, south wall, detail. Source: Duell 1938 vol. II, pl. 120.</p>

In **Figure 7.4b**, a block of hieroglyphic text even seems to act as a surface on which the offerings being presented are being, or are about to be, rested, again demonstrating the versatility of text as a mode in Ancient Egypt. The broken frames create a direct physical link between the depictions of cult participants and the tomb owner, which may well reflect the notion of a ‘real’ connection existing between the living and the dead – perhaps in a similar way to the permeable, liminal nature of false doors. Such depictions give the

impression that offerings given by cult participants reach the deceased in an immediate manner without any barrier, highlighting to the viewer that offering is a means through which to have a direct interaction with the dead and fulfil their part of the reciprocal relationship. This may act as an incentive for them to make offerings themselves. The hieroglyphic offerings in front of Mereruka's face in **Figure 7.4a** are without borders or groundlines, just like those frequently depicted in false door 'slab scenes' and in the large-scale motif of the tomb owner seated before a table of offerings, and are not separated at all from him. This spatial connection between the offerings and the tomb owner may also be a conceptual one: the former reach and affect the latter in a direct manner.

Turning once again to Merefnebef's very well-preserved west tomb chapel – in which ceramics were also discovered, as discussed below – we can examine an example of the complex communications conveyed through the employment of multiple modes and framing in and around an overall 'offering location' composition. As explained previously, the west wall of Merefnebef's chapel is unusual as the entrance completely bisects it, splitting the decorative programme of the wall into two halves, each framed by a multi-coloured border and containing its own false door (**Figures 7.5a-b**). While the wall is divided in this way, it can also be viewed as a single composition in that the striding figures of the tomb owner border it symmetrically on the far left (south) and right (north).

Where inscriptions exist on the false door in my selection of tombs, the text on the pairs of jambs is usually oriented symmetrically, as with the jambs of Merefnebef's false doors (**Figures 7.5a-b**). Merefnebef's west wall is framed by two striding figures on either end of each side. A degree of symmetry is maintained on both sides of the wall by the registers of offering bearers framing each false door, with a larger number of registers of offering bearers on the northern side (**Figure 7.5a**). An impression of greater weight on the southern side is given by the large image of the tomb owner seated before the offering table (**Figure 7.5b**). It is in front of the southern false door that a pot stand was found *in situ* (discussed below).

Compositions also apportion relative values to elements within them. For example, elements that are placed above others are 'up' and thus can be construed as 'positive' by the viewer, with the converse for those that are placed down low. This is due to metaphorical associations, i.e. conceptual metaphors (Van Leeuwen 2005: 200; see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980). A conceptual metaphor particularly prevalent in Egyptian art and language is that of 'big = important', which conveys a connection between relative size and relative

salience, and usually relative social status²³⁶ (Nyord 2013b: 153-55). This is a particular modal affordance that Ancient Egyptian imagery has: it can convey the social importance of a person, as well as the importance of their presence within a given scene. As Nyord writes, the dimension of size is ‘freed’ from communicating ‘actual’ size and distance (ibid. 150, 153). Therefore, it can be used to convey other information. The conceptual metaphor, ‘big = important’, is clearly visible in **Figures 7.5a-b**, in which Merefnebef is depicted on a larger scale than the other figures on the west wall. Although the figures of Merefnebef on both of his false doors (on the pairs of jambs and slab scenes) are depicted on the same scale as the surrounding figures, he nevertheless dominates the composition overall.

If the conceptual metaphor ‘big = important’ is extended to non-anthropomorphic features in scenes (in this case, offerings), it can shed light on the perceived significance of these elements relative to the people depicted (here, the deceased and offering bearers). Where offerings are depicted, they are on approximately the same scale as the offering bearers; but when pictured alongside the tomb owner, the importance of the latter takes precedence, despite the space occupied by offerings and offering lists. For example, in the large offering table scene in **Figure 7.5b**, the list is at a smaller scale than the image of Merefnebef seated at the table. The vases and ewers below the table, as well as the table itself and the loaves of bread, seem to be at the same scale as him. However, the offerings piled up behind the table are on a slightly smaller scale, similar to those being transported by the offering bearers who appear elsewhere in the composition. In both of the false door slab scenes (see **Figures 7.5a-b**), the table and loaves are again depicted at the same scale as Merefnebef; likewise the ewer and other vessels in the slab scene in **Figure 7.5b**.

Drawing on the ‘big = important’ conceptual metaphor, we might conclude that while the offering table and its bread, ewer, and accompanying vessels are as important as the tomb owner, the other items of food and drink are not such an important element of the decoration on the wall. This being the case, if one of the key functions of imagery of offerings in tombs was to ‘magically’ manifest a permanent supply for the deceased, we might expect it to take a more dominant position – and relative size – in the decorative programme. However, if all of the depictions of offerings were at the same scale as the tomb owner, it would reduce his visual dominance. Therefore, given the relative size of the tomb owner versus the offerings, the presentification of the deceased in the space appears to be more vital than the representation or ‘magical’ manifestation of offerings.

²³⁶ On size conveying social difference in Egyptian art, see Assmann 1987: 30-32; Schäfer 1986 [1974]: 230-34; Wilkinson 1994a: 38-48; for a recent discussion of some examples in Old Kingdom tombs, see Auenmüller 2018: 29-31.

Image of chapel wall removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 7.5a: Merefnebef's west chapel, west wall, northern end.
Source: Adapted from Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. XVIII.

Image of chapel wall removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Figure 7.5b: Merefnebef's west chapel, west wall, southern end.
Source: Adapted from Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. XXIII.

Nyord highlights that the conceptual metaphor ‘big = important’, common in Egyptian linguistic and artistic phenomena, is an ‘embedded multimodal metaphor’ (2013b: 154-55, citing Forceville 2008: 474-76). It is multimodal in that more than one sign system and/or sensory mode is involved (such as image and text), following Forceville’s understanding of multimodality (see Forceville 2008: 469). Forceville notes that further studies into multimodal metaphor can aid in exploring what Kress and Van Leeuwen term ‘multimodal discourse’ (ibid. 476)²³⁷. He suggests various avenues of further research regarding metaphors, including the ways in which they are used (in the current era) by advertisers to promote products in different modes, or how that might be used in designing media (such as instruction manuals) to persuade people to carry out certain actions or make particular decisions (ibid. 476-77). While I am not focusing on metaphor in my work, in my opinion there are clear parallels between the persuasive and instructional deployment of metaphor that Forceville suggests, and the multimodal decorative programmes in Egyptian tombs – as demonstrated through ‘big = important’. Further study in this area could be fruitful.

Adding objects to the discussion of modal affordances, offering-related ceramic forms illustrate the complex combinations of modal types in the presentation and manifestation of food and drink for the deceased. Pot stands, bowls, platters, beer jars, and bread moulds are frequently depicted on tomb walls, in texts (such as offering lists), and also feature in the archaeological record as material remnants of offerings acts in and around tomb complexes. As outlined above, while in my view images alone cannot manifest a presence without ritual activation, they can act as prompts and guides for the living. Images of vessels can communicate the offering situations in which they should be used.

In **Figure 7.5b**, the hourglass-shaped pot stand can be seen holding up the offering table, which is loaded with bread loaves and placed before the tomb owner. Additionally, the depictions of offering bearers demonstrate that participants are to bring vessels of offerings to the tomb owner who sits at the table. Images of the tomb owner present at the table and being given offerings there reflect the desired scenario in the tomb: the deceased is present behind/at the false door, and thus at the offering table or slab that is usually situated there (see **Chapter 2**), with food and drink transported there in vessels and other containers by offerants. This notion is reinforced through the frequent inclusion of slab scenes in false doors – these show the tomb owner seated at the offering table (visible in **Figures 7.5a-b**).

²³⁷ As Forceville notes, other authors used alternative terminology for ‘multimodal discourse’, such as ‘rhetoric of the image’ (2008: 476, citing Barthes 1986 [1964]).

Offering-related ceramics have occasionally been found *in situ* in Old Kingdom Saqqara tombs. A pot stand was discovered on the floor of the pillared hall (room IC) of Kaiemheset’s tomb (McFarlane 2003: 37, citing Quibell and Hayter 1927: 18-19)²³⁸. During the excavation of Merefnebef’s west chapel, a pot stand (SQ 97-441) was discovered *in situ* on the offering table in front of the southern false door (**Figure 7.6**) (Rzeuska 2001: 165; 2006: 350 no. 787).

<p>Image of pot stand removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.</p>	<p>Image of cult participants removed for copyright reasons. Copyright Épron and Daumas 1939.</p>
<p>Figure 7.6: Pot stand found <i>in situ</i> on the offering table of the southern false door in Merefnebef’s west chapel, combined here with a bowl also found in the chapel. Source: Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. CXIIc.</p>	<p>Figure 7.7: Cult participant (centre) transporting a pot stand and bowl combination. Tomb of Ty, detail. Source: Épron and Daumas 1939: pl. LIII, detail.</p>

Merefnebef’s pot stand was painted white at least twice (ibid. 513, footnote 331)²³⁹. Certain other ceramics discovered in his west chapel, including bowls, were also found to be white coated²⁴⁰ (see **Table A2** in Appendix, pp. 271-73). White coated ceramics were significant in the offering cult as demonstrated through finds of them *in situ*, particularly in association

²³⁸ Quibell and Hayter’s 1927 publication does not give the precise location of the pot stand found in the pillared hall. The pillared hall is the only preserved decorated room in Kaiemheset’s family tomb complex and is now badly damaged (the offering chapel only had an inscribed offering basin); however, the remaining decoration includes a *ḥtp-di-niswt* inscription on the west wall, and an additional plaster fragment of an offering table scene might also have originated from this wall (McFarlane 2003: 30-34).

²³⁹ A sample of the white coating from the pot stand, among other vessels from West Saqqara, was chemically analysed (Rzeuska 2006: Appendix 2).

²⁴⁰ A miniature plate was also found there; three other pot stands and part of a fifth, as well as three bowls and the rims of two other bowls, were discovered in the debris of the chapel (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 208-209; Rzeuska 2001: 165). The bowls and pot stands were red-slipped and polished, and covered with “white wash” – the pot stands were coated on their internal and external surfaces (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 209).

with false doors and offering tables²⁴¹. Rzeuska concludes that the bowls would have sat on top of the pot stands, forming combinations called *h3wt* (**Figure 7.7**), which would have been used for offerings (Rzeuska 2001: 165). In the following chapter (**Section 8.iii**), I will argue that the repeated white coating of particular areas, features, and objects in the tomb had a ritual significance. Here, I propose a complementary possibility: namely that white coating was employed to ‘mark out’ areas, features, and objects as especially salient to the mortuary cult. In this instance, white coating would have a particular modal affordance.

Rzeuska places ceramics found in and around tombs into two categories: ‘cult pottery’ and ‘offering pottery’; the former being found inside chapels and on/beside installations, and the latter being found in front of chapels, near their entrances, and inside their courts (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 208). She adds that as cult pottery is rarer than offering pottery and often of higher quality, it was likely left at the offering place permanently rather than being disposed of (ibid.; Rzeuska 2006: 512-15). Rzeuska posits that white coating was used to “purify” cult pottery and to denote that it pertained to the “sacred” rather than “profane” sphere (2006: 515). As so-called ‘offering pottery’ was not coated white, yet took some of the same forms as ‘cult pottery’, Rzeuska adds that it is not just the shape of a ceramic form, but also its location (especially if *in situ*) that points to its function (ibid. 513-15). In my view, it is possible that the white coating on a vessel within a tomb helped to visually signal that it was a piece of ‘cult pottery’ and thus a semi-permanent part of an offering location²⁴². Therefore, a combination of object form + location + colour + coating substance was used to impart a message to a visitor or cult participant.

Objects such as ceramics also have another affordance, which is both a modal and physical one. As just mentioned, objects can be left permanently in a certain location, or indeed moved elsewhere if their weight and size afford transportation. This is in contrast to images and texts adorning tomb walls, which cannot be easily relocated (although they can be painted over or re-carved). The portability of ceramic vessels, censers, and other objects used in the offering cult is a physical affordance, but it can also be considered a modal one in that these items can be used to manifest offerings – albeit *together with* ritual acts involving gesture and words – even if the vessels are empty (discussed below).

²⁴¹ White coated ceramic forms have been found in other Old Kingdom tombs. For example, at Abusir, two pot stands “covered with a thick coat of white plaster” were found *in situ* before the false door in Geger’s 5th Dynasty tomb (Rzeuska 2006: 513, Bárta 2001: 126-28 and pl. XLIV, b-c).

²⁴² One of the bowls (SQ 97-448) was decorated with two red and blue coloured stripes under the rim, while its lower part is painted red (Rzeuska 2001: 165).

To this consideration of social aspects of offerings, I would add materialisation of social ties. Many people related in some way to the tomb owner may be depicted within the tomb, including family members, dependents, and priests; these people can be represented through images, while their names may also be included in captions or other inscriptions. It is possible that objects such as so-called ‘serving statues’,²⁴³ materialise connections between such people, who are responsible for the mortuary cult, and the deceased – rather than being statues that would ‘magically’ serve the tomb owner in the afterlife (Nyord 2016).

Similarly, social ties may be materialised through offering-related ceramics forms left in and around tomb complexes. In addition to those left in specific locations, such as the abovementioned pot stands and bowls that were placed in front of the false door, lower quality ‘disposable’ ceramics were used for offerings and then discarded (Rzeuska’s ‘offering pottery’, see 2006: 512-13). Ceramic forms could leave permanent traces, whereas a voice and gesture offering could not. Therefore, material remains of an offering visually indicate that people have already been making offerings, which might demonstrate that the deceased person around whose tomb the objects have been left is a worthy recipient of offerings and/or prompt passers-by to make further offerings. They also materialise links between the living and the deceased, even if the people leaving the objects are passers-by rather than people with pre-existing links to the tomb owner. The potential implication for the ‘hierarchy’ of offerings is that although voice acts could be viewed as substitutive for perishable offerings, they do not leave physical traces in the tomb environment *unless* accompanied by objects used in offerings, such as ceramics. It can be suggested that material presence is an important aspect of the mortuary cult’s operation.

7.iii. The hierarchy of offering modes

As evidenced by the so-called ‘appeals to the living’ genre of texts, making perishable offerings of food and drink to the deceased was preferable. This type of offering also entailed certain actions, such as pouring or lifting up, as some of the texts specify. Should the tomb visitor have no physical offering items with them, the text requests that they make a voice offering (*pṛt-ḥrw*). Even in this case, actions are considered important, as the texts may mention gesturing with the arm. However, voice offerings *ideally* entail a physical element of food and drink, as captions accompanying some images of offering bearers in tombs denote that they are bringing certain goods for the tomb owner’s *pṛt-ḥrw*. Therefore, a ‘hierarchy’ of preferred offering modes can be deduced from the texts: perishable food and

²⁴³ On the topic of serving statues, see Roth (2002) and Tooley (1995).

drink offerings are at the top of this hierarchy, followed by voice offerings. Perishable offerings are an ideal part of the *pwt-hrw*, and both perishable and voice offerings are to be accompanied by specific gestures.

The assumption is that when the texts mention types of offerings by name (beer, water, bread, etc.) they are perishable. Ceramic finds from my selection of tombs indicate that forms associated with offerings were frequently discovered around – and sometimes in – tomb complexes. Regardless of whether these vessels contained perishable substances, they could have been used in offerings: voice offerings could have been made with them, together with the prescribed gestures and actions, just as in the scenario when a visitor did not possess any food and drink. A lack of ‘real’ food and drink did not preclude offerings being manifested for the deceased. Rather, the above deductions underscore that actions are one of the most essential elements in the presentation and manifestation of offerings. Yet modes must occur in particular combinations in order to be effective. I will illustrate in **Chapter 8** that actions *as well as* words are vital to creative acts and magic in Ancient Egypt, including in activating the effectiveness of offerings for the dead.

In social semiotic terms, should a tomb visitor make an offering using speech, this is a ‘speech act’ – and it is also multimodal, as it involves gesture. Speech acts comprise three different acts: a *locutionary act*, which is a statement that refers to the situation at hand and is understandable to the listener; an *illocutionary act*, which is a communication with a given intention (for example, warning, promising, or offering something); and a *perlocutionary act*, which is the effect on the listener that the other two acts have (for example, affecting behaviour or emotions) (Van Leeuwen 2005: 117-19, citing Austin 1962). The *perlocutionary* aspect is very pertinent here because the effect of a speech act of offerings is to manifest nourishment for the dead. I have argued before that actions are a vital accompaniment to the words spoken. Moreover, offering speech acts are to be performed under certain conditions, namely, at the specific location of the tomb complex – this is an example of what Austin refers to as ‘felicity conditions’ (ibid.)

A speech act is always dialogic, that is, an interaction involving reciprocity – for example, an offer from one party and an acceptance by the other (Van Leeuwen 2005: 118, citing Halliday 1985: 68). Indeed, for any communication to occur, more than one party is required: one to design a message or prompt, and another to receive and interpret it (Kress 2010: 35). The notion of reciprocity is one that I have referred to throughout the preceding chapters. A minimum of two parties is required for the operation of the mortuary cult: the living and the deceased.

The use of different modes to nourish the deceased permits various groups of people to engage in the mortuary cult – people whose literacy levels and access to resources may vary. A number of ‘letters to the dead’ (see also p.68) dating to the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period are written on vessels (see Donnat 2002; Gardiner and Sethe 1928; Moreno García 2010; Wentz 1990). Here, the combination of text and object is utilised simultaneously to communicate a request to the dead and participate in the cult. The vessels might have held perishable offerings in an act of expectant reciprocity: assistance from the deceased in exchange for sustenance from the living. It is unclear whether the kin wrote the letters themselves or employed scribes to do so; Moreno García suggests that writing such letters was an elite practice and linked to literacy (2010: 140-41, but cf. Zinn 2018).

Yet the vessels would not necessarily have had to contain imperishable offerings. Offerings can be made with the combination of voice and gesture, and thus a vessel could be ritually activated (see **Section 8.ii**) and become representative of an offering. The living could therefore sustain the dead without needing to have perishable goods at hand. This is beneficial to both the deceased and the living parties in the communication: the tomb owner might still receive some sustenance even if a visitor does not have physical items with them; and the visitor does not need to expend potentially costly resources in order to give offerings.

The use of gestures and spoken words allows even people who are illiterate, partially literate, and/or who do not possess special ritual knowledge to participate in the offering cult. Those with some degree of literacy might be able to pronounce the tomb owner’s name, and those with none might be able to recite a basic offering formula from memory, being visually prompted to do so by the images on the outer and inner areas of the tomb.

However, some appeals to the living specifically refer to the ‘secret craft’ of priests – it is possible that offering rituals carried out by these specialists, contracted to officiate in the cult (see Legros 2016: 136-41), were more desirable than offerings made by ‘any passer-by’ who might stop at the tomb. The latter would likely not have had access to ritual knowledge, including that contained in restricted texts, unless they happened to hold particular official roles. Still, it is conceivable that once the content of the texts had been recited and enacted by such specialists during the funeral or at the point of the tomb’s completion, they were then ‘activated’²⁴⁴. Henceforth, even if these texts were not read out in their entirety by visitors, a formula pronounced from memory or read to the best of the participant’s ability might suffice in order to sustain the dead. This would be with the visitor carrying out crucial

²⁴⁴ See **Section 8.ii** for ‘ritual activation’, and for further comment on access to magic and specialist knowledge.

accompanying *actions*, which were depicted on the tomb walls together with the types of food and drink that should ideally be proffered.

Whether people would be able to effect offerings if they were illiterate or partially literate is an ongoing question. Although appeal texts may include any passer-by, such a person would have to be able to read such an address to know that they were being appealed to. If certain ritual texts had to read precisely from a scroll or tomb wall, how could someone effect offerings if not literate enough to read the instructions? The possibility remains that the tombs were designed for an elite audience and, as noted in **Section 4.ii**, that those visiting the necropolis would have been elite and hence literate (Redford 2000: 154-57). The demography of the tomb audience cannot be ascertained with certainty, but even if it was predominantly elite this does not undermine my suggestion that different offering modes provided opportunities for different groups of people to participate in the cult²⁴⁵. Even within the elite, the resources at individuals' disposal would vary, as would literacy levels, especially if female tomb visitors are taken into account²⁴⁶.

Social aspects were key to the operation of the mortuary cult and to the modes employed: the elaborate decoration of the tomb façade, made possible by the tomb owner's status, invites passers-by to make offerings at the entrance and/or to enter further into the tomb; texts detailing the deceased's good behaviour in life might also encourage offerings from those who could read; the allure of reciprocity encouraged people to make offerings that they themselves might receive them in future; and, crucially, as different offering modes could nourish the deceased, people of varying resources could participate in the cult. Further, physical remnants of offering acts – particularly ceramic forms – materialised social links between the living and dead in the tomb environment, demonstrating that the deceased had received offerings. Perhaps this imparted the message that they were worthy of this and prompted people to make further offerings.

This is one notable way in which the social semiotic notion of 'design' comes into play. Design is prospective, being "a means of projecting an individual's interest into their world with the intent of effect in the future" (Kress 2010: 23). In the preceding chapters I have proposed that tomb decoration was employed to elicit actions from the living through messages about reciprocity: this is just one way in which tomb design was used to promote

²⁴⁵ My study concerns only elite, decorated tombs of the Old Kingdom; future research that compares these with non-elite tombs with regard to offerings provision would be welcome in order to enrich the discussion.

²⁴⁶ Regarding the literacy of women in pharaonic Egypt, see Baines and Eyre 2007.

an individual's interests²⁴⁷. All modes used to 'decorate' the tomb are purposefully designed to impart the message that *this is an environment in which offerings and provisions are to be secured for the deceased*²⁴⁸. The designer of a communication must consider the available resources for communication and the most apt way of imparting their message in light of their interests (motivation), resources, and target audience (ibid. 26-27)²⁴⁹. This audience was the living, whose input was vital for the sustenance of the deceased.

7.iv. Conclusion

As outlined, an array of potential cult participants is catered for through different options of offering modes. This not only provided a wider pool from which the deceased could draw sustenance, but allowed various groups of people to be involved in the mortuary cult, and hence reap the benefits outlined in the appeals to the living. Multiple modes facilitated interaction between the living and the dead, and modes' careful deployment in communicating to the living further highlights their perceived importance in the cult.

The foregoing examination of the affordances of offering modes demonstrates the complexity of tomb decorative programmes and moreover the conceptualisation of offering modes in Ancient Egypt. The tomb environment was designed to communicate information to the living regarding the operation of the mortuary cult. When added to the conclusions drawn regarding physical affordances, a more holistic picture of tomb design and use emerges, namely that the tomb space and its features were designed with active viewing and, moreover, usage in mind.

Although a plethora of communicative devices can be analysed through a multimodal, social semiotic lens, I focused on framing as it is particularly noticeable in my selection of tombs, being used in conjunction with images, texts, ceramics, and offering installations to guide the eye of the viewer towards the offering points of the tomb and to impart salient information regarding the performance of the cult. The most critical parts of a given visual composition (such as a decorated tomb wall) are not only framed, but may also be subject to the conceptual metaphor 'big = important' in order to signal their significance to the viewer.

²⁴⁷ Vischak also suggests that the Old Kingdom elite adapted elements of tomb design to legitimise themselves and position themselves within the prevailing religious ideology (2003: 134-35).

²⁴⁸ This is not to say that there are no other communications occurring; one example would be the social status of the tomb owner. As mentioned previously, tomb decorative programmes may impart a multiplicity of meanings.

²⁴⁹ An interesting line of further study would be a comparison of offering-related visual and textual motifs, and offering installations, of 'elite' and 'non-elite' tombs. This might reveal which components were considered the most fundamental for the sustenance of the deceased. The motif of the tomb owner seated at a table laden with offerings is a prevalent motif, notably on 'slab stelae' of Giza tombs that were otherwise undecorated. Vischak (2006) similarly suggests that a hierarchy in decorative scenes existed for elite tombs during the Old Kingdom.

Different modes afford different types of communications: statues or other anthropomorphic images in the round can meet the viewer's gaze with both eyes; the orientation and arrangement of hieroglyphs can be manipulated to make use of space, to affect symmetry, and to act as an eye-catching and guiding feature; text could impart descriptive information (for example about the tomb owner's professional titles) that images could not do as easily; the portability of ceramic forms permitted that they be transported and deposited in areas of the tomb in order to materialise social connections and encourage offerings; and even white colouring on cult ceramics contributed information to the viewer.

While multiple types of offering modes could be used, certain modes seem to have been preferred. Perishable food and drink offerings seem to have topped the 'hierarchy', but if these could not be given, offerings made with the voice, accompanied by gestures, were acceptable. Yet, in an ideal situation, even the *pwt-hrw* had a 'real' food and drink component. From the complex visual compositions in decorated tombs, it is clear that combinations of modes were commonly employed together. Moreover, some modes did not operate effectively alone: notably, gesture must accompany voice. It seems that multiple modes were used in order to encourage and prompt visitors to provide offerings; the notion of 'more is better' might apply in this instance.

Fundamentally, the modes used in the tomb were designed to signal information about the social standing and life of the tomb owner, the provision of offerings (when, where, who, and how), and social ties between the deceased, his family, dependents, and even passers-by. Reciprocity was a key social notion that linked the living and the dead, and different modes provided opportunities for the living, depending on their resources, literacy levels, and ritual knowledge, to participate in the cult.

Chapter 8. ‘Magical’ offerings as related to the operation of the cult

In the previous chapters, I have proposed that tomb features and decoration were designed to elicit and facilitate cult participation from tomb visitors. I have also shown that actions carried out by the living were necessary for the effective functioning of the mortuary cult and thus the deceased’s sustenance. In this chapter, I argue that the final, indispensable, way in which the living were involved in the cult was that they ‘activated’ the ability (agency) of offerings to sustain the deceased, and also ‘maintained’ the ritual effectiveness of key areas of the tomb in order to ensure the continued sustenance of its owner.

I propose that offering-related images, texts, and objects (offering ‘modes’) in the tomb were not thought to have inherent agency to generate sustenance for the deceased, but instead that their agency derived from a particular source, namely the force of magic (*ḥkꜣ/ḥw*²⁵⁰). I argue that, although the agency of offerings hinged upon this force, its successful deployment required input from the living.

The operation of the mortuary cult, and the provision of offerings, was undeniably contingent upon sociality. Food and drink offerings did not have an inherent ‘magical’ capacity to nourish the deceased without actions from the living, who were part of a hierarchical network of relationships that included the king, the gods, and the dead – and one in which reciprocity was vital.

8.i. ‘Magical’ offerings and the nature of magic

While Egyptologists may suggest that images, texts, and objects within the tomb are ‘magical’ and create a type of reality that the tomb owner can experience beyond death, they still acknowledge that the mechanism of their effectiveness is not well understood (Vischak 2006: 256-57; Zinn 2017: 213)²⁵¹. The application of the term ‘magical’ is rarely clarified beyond remarks concerning the supposed permanent efficacy of such offerings versus the perishable ones that were presented to the dead in the ongoing mortuary cult.

There is also little mention of whether the perishable food and drink offerings should be considered magical, even though they are perceived to be effective in sustaining the

²⁵⁰ I retain the specific Egyptian terms for magic (*ḥkꜣ* and *ḥw*) when they appear in the Egyptian sources to which I am referring. Otherwise, I use the general term ‘magic’ or ‘magical’ (encompassing both *ḥkꜣ* and *ḥw*). When referencing another author’s remarks on magic, I retain their original English wording in double quotation marks and the Egyptian terms when used.

²⁵¹ As Vischak notes, interpretations of tomb imagery often fall into two groups: literal (*Sehbild*) and symbolic (*Sinnbild*) (2006: 256-57); see further van Walsem 1998; 2005. Regarding the idea that images created a world of things that the deceased could make use of and seek company from, see Bolshakov 1997: 152.

deceased, yet are not physically consumed by them²⁵². Perishable offerings were divided among cult personnel in payment for services rendered via the so-called ‘reversion of offerings’; this applied to personnel performing cult duties in temple and private contexts (Davies 2018: 94; Málek 1986: 74-76; Snape 2011: 42-43)²⁵³.

Roeten, however, does attempt to differentiate between some of the offering modes in respect of their being “magical”, as well as “active” or “passive”, stating that the way in which food offerings reached the deceased was always “dependent on magic” (2011: 175; 2014: 337). According to Roeten, the *recitation* of an offering formula is a non-magical yet active action, but the *inscription* of such a text is magical yet passive, because he classes texts and images as “magical” and “passive”, but the recitation of the offering formula as “active”, being part of the cult performance (2014: 336, footnote 10, 338). Contra Roeten, I explicate in this chapter that magic – as related to offerings in particular – was contingent upon action. Moreover, I foreground the role of the living in the ‘activation’ of offerings.

First, however, the term ‘magic’ must be clarified. Ritner draws attention to issues surrounding the terminology and understanding of Egyptian magic in his seminal 1993 work²⁵⁴. Care must be taken when using the term ‘magic’ without further explanation: a scholar might state that the nature or mechanism of a given offering mode is ‘magical’, yet this could denote their own, etic interpretation rather than the Egyptian, emic conceptualisation. This links back to Holbraad’s recommendation (**Section 2.iii**) that archaeologists and anthropologists pursue *conceptualisations* of phenomena in order to gain an understanding of them (2009: 433-34).

‘Magical’ is perhaps a convenient term to utilise when the way in which an offering mode or mechanism works defies the logic of modern (and usually Western) science (see Ritner 1993: 69). Conversely, certain phenomena that are scientifically explicable might have been thought of as “magical” by the Egyptians (Te Velde 1970: 176). The Egyptian term *ḥkꜣ* does not directly map onto the English term ‘magic’, although it is usually translated as such. This obscures the differences between the Egyptian and English (and other Western)

²⁵² There is occasional mention in the literature of food being ‘magically’ received by the deceased through the false door (for example see O’Neill 2015: 19). Roeten also states that “the food supply of the *ka* of the deceased had always been dependent on magic” (2014: 337). Bolshakov’s (1997) solution regarding the ability of perishable and imperishable foods to feed the dead does not depend upon magic.

²⁵³ The offering list in Kagemni’s Saqqara tomb specifies ‘an offering which the king gives: a reversion of things: 1 reversion’ (Firth and Gunn 1926: 124-25). In the tomb of Bia/Irery at Saqqara, *ka* priests are urged to “give bread, beer, and water (as) the reversion offering of my lord” (Shubert 2007: 26-27).

²⁵⁴ Ritner takes an emic approach and highlights the problematic choice of ‘magic’ as a translation of *ḥkꜣ* because of the associations that the former term imports from Western thought and history (Ritner 1993: 1-13, 236-49; see also Ritner 1992).

conceptualisations of the concept, and becomes a reductive description for something complex. It is therefore useful to distinguish between a purely explanatory use of the term ‘magical’ from a modern, Western perspective and situations in which the Egyptian concept of magic is actually involved. Another Egyptian term related to *ḥkꜣ*, but less prominent than it, is *ꜣḥw*. This too is often translated as ‘magic’ or ‘spells’²⁵⁵. While Borghouts posits a difference between the terms *ḥkꜣ* and *ꜣḥw* (1980, 1987), Ritner stresses that the terms are often used interchangeably and refutes any distinction predicated on their creative or destructive attributes (1993: 30-35).

The cosmological primacy of magic in Ancient Egypt is striking. References from the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts, as well as the First Intermediate Period Coffin Texts²⁵⁶, demonstrate that the god *Ḥkꜣ* has power over the cosmos and that *ḥkꜣ* takes precedence over the rest of creation (Allen 1988: 37-38, referencing CT 261; Ritner 1993: 16, referencing PT 472)²⁵⁷. Further, creation was perceived as an ongoing and cyclical process: the god *Ḥkꜣ* has given and continues to give life to the gods, being immanent in the cosmos because the creator god is immanent in him (Ritner 1993: 18; 23, citing CT 261 and 641).

Not only was *ḥkꜣ* a gift from the gods – a creative force that animates and permeates the cosmos, body, and earth – but also a force through which the world was maintained (Assmann 1997: 3; Ritner 1993: 17-18, 23, 240)²⁵⁸. In written sources, magic may be described as ‘secret’ (*sšꜣ*), effective (*ꜣḥ*), and powerful (*pḥty*) (Ritner 1993: 242). Textual references to both the force *ḥkꜣ* and the god *Ḥkꜣ*²⁵⁹ are evidenced from the Old Kingdom onwards, as is a cult for the veneration of the god *Ḥkꜣ* (ibid. 15-16, 26, 242; Te Velde 1970: 177; Zinn 2012: 1). Although dating to a later period than this study’s focus, the New Kingdom mortuary text *The Book of the Heavenly Cow* reveals that the god *Ḥkꜣ* was perceived to be present in effective spells (Te Velde 1970: 186). This demonstrates that *ḥkꜣ*, once appropriately channelled, could imbue or reside in actions in order to achieve effects²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁵ A literal translation of *ꜣḥw* would be ‘effective things’; the root *ꜣḥ* meaning ‘to be effective’ or ‘to be bright’ (see Ritner 1993: 30).

²⁵⁶ It should be noted that the First Intermediate Period dating of the Coffin Texts is debated: see for example Willems 2014.

²⁵⁷ The relationship between *ḥkꜣ* and the creator-god Re-Atum is nuanced: *ḥkꜣ* emerged when Re-Atum first spoke, and while it takes priority over the other gods and natural forces, it is still subordinate to him (Allen 1988: 37-38; Ritner 1993: 17-18).

²⁵⁸ The First Intermediate Period text *Instructions for Merikare* indicates that *ḥkꜣ* was a divine gift for mankind to use as a weapon to change the course of events (Te Velde 1970: 186, citing Maystre 1941: 90). It should be noted that *ḥkꜣ* can be used to destructive as well as creative ends (Ritner 1993: 23, 25).

²⁵⁹ See Ritner 1993: 16 regarding the overlap and the inconsistency in differentiating between *ḥkꜣ* as a force and *Ḥkꜣ* as a god in the Egyptian texts.

²⁶⁰ Spoken magic could, for example, imbue spittle with magical properties, and water could be similarly imbued via contact with magic inscriptions (Ritner 1993: 87-88).

It is clear that *hkʿ* is an all-pervading and powerful force which, through its potential and potency, plays a fundamental role in creation and maintenance, and in effecting particular outcomes. The creative potential of *hkʿ* is central to the ‘magical’ operation of offerings – if *hkʿ* is present in, or imbued into, the different offering modes of text, image, object, and speech, it is conceivable that they can manifest nourishment for the deceased. As *hkʿ* is part of a repeated cycle, one which is ongoing, incomplete, and *in potentia*, I suggest that its usage and effectiveness is predicated on activation and maintenance. Further, as it is a ‘secret’ and ‘effective’ force, people with access to written sources regarding magic were likely the ones to harness it most effectively (see **Section 8.iv**).

Creation, speech, and magic

Speech as a means of bringing something into being is highly relevant in relation to the recitation of offering formulae and offering lists, which enumerated offerings for the deceased. As appeals to the living indicate, the pronouncement of offerings was a significant act in providing for the deceased. Additionally, later appeals indicate that the act of speaking the dead person’s name was considered vital for their remembrance (Shubert 2007: 364-67). The continued performance of the cult, and especially the recitation of the *pṛt-hrw* containing the deceased’s name, was therefore crucial in keeping the dead within social memory²⁶¹.

Speaking is one of the key methods of creation mentioned in Egyptian texts across periods (Assmann 2007: 21). Speech as a means of creation gains in prominence during the New Kingdom, but follows earlier precursors in the Coffin Texts (*ibid.* 19, 22). In discussing creation accounts, Allen draws important conclusions regarding the force of *hkʿ* that are pertinent to its role in making mortuary offerings effective. Creative speech or annunciation (*hw*) is used by the creator subsequent to perception (*šḥ*) in order to bring things into being (1988: 38)²⁶². Crucially, *hw* is made effective through *hkʿ* and it is the latter that enables the creator to bring about everything in the created world (*ibid.*). As mentioned, *hkʿ* takes precedence over the rest of creation, with CT 261 demonstrating that the god Heka (*Hkʿ*) was created before the god Hu (*Hw*, i.e. the *Logos*) (Ritner 1993: 17). Ritner highlights that words and magic are closely interconnected, with CT 261 providing an ontological explanation for this: magic (the god Heka) resides in the word (the god Hu); he argues that Heka imbued Hu with “magical vitality”, enabling the creation of the cosmos and other gods (*ibid.*)

²⁶¹ See Lapp for the stages in the offering ritual pertaining to the *pṛt-hrw* (1986, particularly Chapter 3).

²⁶² The king, as well as the gods, can utilise these two principles (Allen 1988: 38).

Allen, also drawing on the Coffin Texts²⁶³ in his discussion of magic (*hkʿ*) as related to creation, notes that magic is a principle through which reality is actualised using the creative power of the spoken word, yet it is not restricted to speech alone (1988: 36-37, 58-59). He adds that anything that effects an outcome can be considered as having the force of magic (ibid. 37, citing Hornung 1982: 207-209). This implies that communicative modes can be used to harness *hkʿ*, as vehicles or channels for it. In Nyord's study of the conceptualisation of the body in the Coffin Texts, a strong connection between the mouth, belly, and magic is evident, as is the significance of speech as an outlet for *hkʿ* that is 'contained' inside the body; further, *hw* and *siʿ* are also connected with magic, the mouth, and the belly, being acquired by eating (2009: 361-66, 368-79)²⁶⁴.

Ritner examines the spoken word both within and outside of creation, and concludes that ritual acts are just as important as speech in harnessing *hkʿ* (1993: 38). He studies in depth the techniques and actions used in magical practices, which had not been analysed prior to his 1993 work (see ibid. 2). Before examining verbal and physical actions with reference to the private mortuary cults at Old Kingdom Saqqara, I will outline the links between magic and visual representations, since offerings are also presented through the modes of text, image, and object.

Visual representation and magic

There are apparent links between the potency of visual representations and the channelling of a creative and effective force to enable this power. The idea that a transmissible creative potential resides in the human *ka* as well as the divine one²⁶⁵ is evident in the Memphite Theology²⁶⁶, a text concerning the role of the god Ptah in creation²⁶⁷. While Ptah was primarily the tutelary god of Memphis during the Old Kingdom, he was also the patron of

²⁶³ Allen mainly discusses CT 261 in relation to 'magic' as a means of creation, but also draws on CT IV 145b-c, CT VII 481g, and P. Bremner Rhind (BM10188) in his explication. BM10188 is a collection of texts compiled during the Ptolemaic Period, although the original might date to the New Kingdom (1988: 27-28). The Coffin Texts that Allen discusses date to the First Intermediate Period and, as such, are much closer in date to the tombs that form the subject of this study.

²⁶⁴ The appearance of *hw* and *siʿ* in the Coffin Texts is markedly earlier than that in the Memphite Theology. However, Nyord notes that the distribution of *hw* being in the mouth (or on the lips) and *siʿ* in the interior is not common in the Coffin Texts, in contrast to later texts (2009: 368, footnote 3748).

²⁶⁵ See Nyord 2019 (particularly 173-75) concerning creation of and by the *ka*. In addition to being something transferrable, *hkʿ* is conceptualised in the Coffin Texts as something that can be possessed or taken away from a person and, as noted above, a substance that can be internalised (Nyord 2009: 355-81).

²⁶⁶ Scholars debate whether the composition is based on earlier source material, but the form in which it appears on the Shabaka stone is generally accepted to be of New Kingdom or later date (Bodine 2009: 9-11). Ockinga (2010) suggests a Ramesside date, but cf. Iversen (1990), who supports an Old Kingdom date. See Bodine 2009 for an overview of scholars' opinions on the date.

²⁶⁷ While Ptah's role in creation becomes more prominent in the New Kingdom, there are earlier references to it in the Coffin Texts (Allen 1988: 38-42). Ptah is a patron of craftsmen, and his role as a builder is mentioned in the Coffin Texts (ibid. 41).

craftsmen²⁶⁸ (Chauvet: 2015: 67-68). The connection between craftsmen and the ‘activation’ of offerings is addressed in **Section 8.ii**. In his analysis of the Memphite Theology, Assmann ascertains that Ptah transferred his power to the gods and their *kas* via his heart (thought) and tongue (utterance), and that this creative power was passed on to humans and all living things (2007: 25)²⁶⁹.

The Memphite Theology also mentions a range of created things that originated through the heart and tongue, some being directly related to offerings: “But all hieroglyphs originated from that which was thought up by the heart and commanded by the tongue. And thus were all *ka*’s [*sic*] created and the Hemuset determined, which bring forth all food and all offering meats by this word... And thus were all trades created, and all arts...” (Assmann 2007: 26)²⁷⁰. Subsequent to perception (*sḥ*), the two fundamental means of creating and representing forms and concepts were speech (*ḥw*) and hieroglyphs²⁷¹. Hieroglyphs were therefore conceptualised first and then spoken into being, and they render pictorially the forms and concepts thought up (ibid. 27)²⁷²

In a study concerning the use of language to create “religious reality”, Popielska-Grzybowska argues that the spells comprising the Old Kingdom royal Pyramid Texts were designed to be uttered by the king, suggesting that it was both the speaking and the writing of the spells in hieroglyphic form in the tomb that made them “sacred”, materialising and creating a religious reality essential for his post-mortem survival (2011: 688-90). Although the Pyramid Texts relate to the royal funerary sphere, the ability for spoken and written words to engender something perceived as ‘real’ is also applicable to the private mortuary cult.

The potency of images and hieroglyphs is further demonstrated through admonitions against their damage. Certain Old Kingdom appeals to the living stipulate that people should not deface writing in the tomb; later appeal texts on stelae from the First Intermediate Period and

²⁶⁸ Ptah’s role as patron of craftsmen likely arose due to his association with Sokar, god of the Memphite necropolis and the primary patron of the crafts at this time (Chauvet: 2015: 67-68).

²⁶⁹ See Breasted 1901: 45-46 for a discussion of the heart as the seat of thought in the Memphite Theology.

²⁷⁰ Cf. Allen’s translation “male life-principles” and “female life-principles” in place of “*ka*’s [*sic*]” and “Hemuset” (1988: 43-44).

²⁷¹ Allen points to the occurrences of the terms *mdw-nṯr* and *tīt* in the Memphite Theology, which can be used to refer to hieroglyphs (1988: 45).

²⁷² An Egyptian term for hieroglyphs being *sš n mdw nṯr* ‘the writing of divine speech’ (Assmann 2007: 27).

Middle Kingdom demonstrate that destroying tomb inscriptions and images²⁷³ was considered a serious transgression (Shubert 2007: 359-61).

While the potency of images and hieroglyphs led to a desire for their protection, it also led to cases of intentional damage, manipulation, and alteration. This is particularly evident in the practice of omitting or only partially representing determinatives that depict living creatures in the royal Pyramid Texts – perhaps to render potentially dangerous creatures harmless since reality could be controlled through the act of writing and the manipulation of it (Iannarilli 2016 and 2018; see also Baines 2007: 56, footnote 52). Iannarilli observes that it is the “strongly iconic” determinatives that are usually modified, rather than phonograms, positing that the former are “invested with greater effectiveness” due to their iconicity²⁷⁴ (2018: 41).

Due to the close relationship between the artistic canon and the pictorial nature of the hieroglyphic writing system, hieroglyphs can be ‘read’ as images and/or text; the interconnection between the two is exemplified in certain specialised representational contexts, notably rebuses and ‘redundant determinatives’ (Silverman 2003: 240-41; Davis 1989: 132). Goldwasser summarises that hieroglyphic signs, due to their iconicity, “are kept oscillating between the word and the world”, noting that icons could be “brought to life” with magic (1995: 80). Baines even attributes transformative potential to visual representation itself, which he describes as being “surrounded by restrictions, taboos, and ‘magic’”, yet does not clarify the interrelations between magic, transformation, and image (2007: 8).

According to Egyptian perception, ‘magic’ is part of the natural order as it is coeval with creation; it is not *supernatural* (Ritner 1993: 8). Ritner illustrates that although magic resided in the body of the practitioner, spells and rites were required to utilise it (ibid. 12, 23)²⁷⁵. As *ḥkꜣ* is within the world from the early moments of creation, being immanent in the cosmos, it apparently resides in all that has been created – perhaps as a creative or effective *potentiality*. I propose that ritual actions, involving verbal and physical elements, activated this potentiality. Creation is an act of articulation, while magic is itself a creative and

²⁷³ The respect for images and writing extends to non-tomb contexts as well, as evidenced by First Intermediate Period ink graffiti at the quarry of Hatnub that threatens people who would damage the figures carved there with punishment from the local gods (Shubert 2007: 362).

²⁷⁴ Iconic hieroglyphs are closely related to 2D, relief, and 3D images; for example, a statue can act as the determinative for the name of the deceased written on it (Goldwasser 1995: 11, footnote 2).

²⁷⁵ For a discussion of *ḥkꜣ* as a substance or power that can be ‘contained’ in the body, and what this reveals about the conceptualisation of *ḥkꜣ* (in particular reference to the Coffin Texts), see Nyord 2009: 70-71 and 355-81. For Nyord’s approach, including an explanation of the ‘containment’ image schema, see ibid. 5-51.

animating force. Its creative and active potential, once realised, can be termed ‘agency’. I suggest that ritual actions are the means through which this realisation occurred.

8.ii. Activating the agency of offerings

I will now address the types of actions, comprising physical and verbal elements, which might have been involved in the ‘activation’ of offerings, i.e. the act of imbuing them via magic with the agency to sustain the deceased.

I suggest that offerings were activated whenever presented as part of the ongoing cult. I also propose that there might have been an *initial* activation of the tomb environment – which contained offering-related images, texts, and objects – carried out by specialists at the point at which a tomb was completed, or during the funeral.

Activation through speech and gesture

Speech is a multi-faceted mode of communicating offerings: the ‘magical’ force of the spoken word is one method through which offering modes could be imbued with the agency or creative potential of *ḥkꜣ*, yet some scholars characterise it as a standalone ‘magical’ method of providing nourishment for the dead. I have already demonstrated that gesture is an important additional component to spoken offering formulae in my discussion of the appeals to the living (Section 4.ii).

The power of speech as related to offerings is evident in the *pṛt-ḥrw* (‘invocation/voice offering’)²⁷⁶. Fischer cites two variant forms of the *pṛt-ḥrw* offering formula attested in the 6th Dynasty Saqqara tomb of *Ḥnty-kꜣ*: what he terms the “newer formulation”, *pṛi-ḥrw n N*, as well as the “old phrase”, *pṛi n=f ḥrw* (1996: 1). The latter may be translated as ‘the voice comes forth for him’. The voice as the subject of the action may have been retained in the formulation *pṛt-ḥrw*, which is also encountered in original texts or provided by translators as a rendering of Gardiner’s hieroglyphic sign O2 (1973: 493). When understood as a perfective relative form, it can be translated as ‘that which the voice has brought forth’. This provides a contrast to the transliteration *pṛt-(r)-ḥrw* (with the preposition ‘*r*’ inserted or understood) and its translation as ‘coming forth at the voice’ (ibid. 172).

Crucially, different possibilities are raised regarding the subject of the action: is it the deceased or the voice that is coming forth? If the latter, then the voice is an active method used to manifest offerings. Moreover, a perfective (rather than imperfective) form indicates

²⁷⁶ See Lapp 1986: 91-194 for the forms and meaning of *pṛt-ḥrw* in the Old Kingdom; see also Clère 1935-1938. For the form *pṛt r ḥrw*, see Lapp 1986: 102.

an action having been undertaken prior to another – the voice has activated that which is presented to the deceased.

I do not intend to imply that the dead were not thought to be present at offering points in some form²⁷⁷. Rather, I am suggesting that particular formulations of the *pṛt-ḥrw* indicate that the voice is key in activating and manifesting offerings, with *gesture* a crucial aspect used alongside it.

The power of speech to invest something, such as offerings, with magic is clear. Ritner illustrates that via “the stroke of a word”, magic can imbue the *kʿ* of anything in creation and give it power; moreover, magic can be made to permeate any object (1993: 23, especially footnote 93, and 25). The oral force of *ḥkʿ* is so strong that it extends to the use of spitting, licking, and swallowing in magical activities (see *ibid.* 74). Redford argues that the acts of reading and speaking aloud go hand-in-hand and, moreover, that “the spoken word itself contained a quasi-magical force, and its intonation liberated the power of the written text” (2000: 159-60). ‘Audible statements’ (*tpt-rʿ*) as a genre in Ancient Egypt include the addresses to the living, *ḥtp-di-niswt* offering formula, and ‘magic’ spells (*ibid.* 173). Redford cites examples of addresses to the living that call upon readers to speak the texts aloud, stating that oral delivery was intended for “magical efficacy”, and he also suggests that listening to the recitation seems to be important, implying that an audience might even be present (*ibid.* 159-61, 171-76).

Whether from memory or from a written source, the act of verbalising an offering text was vital. The importance of precision, already mentioned in regard to the copying of magic texts, might also extend to recitation in the case of offering texts: if such a text were read aloud, and certain gestures made (as outlined in the appeals to the living), then the specifications were being followed. In this instance, text, recitation, and gesture work together. If an offering were recited from memory²⁷⁸, presumably its effectiveness would be predicated on the speaker remembering the formula correctly. Baines points out that the Egyptians placed emphasis on the importance of copying and performing magic texts with precision (2007: 56)²⁷⁹. Redford likewise highlights the necessity of reading texts with religious ritual content from a written source, to make certain that the correct formula was being followed and hence ensure its effectiveness (2000: 166-67). Zinn’s work on literacy

²⁷⁷ Refer back to pp. 92-94, 109-21.

²⁷⁸ For the intersection of orality and the written word, as well as the transmission of (restricted) knowledge, see for example Baines 2007: 146-78; Haikal 2013; Zinn 2018.

²⁷⁹ Redford also notes that mortuary rituals, daily temple rituals, and festival activities are carried out according to written instructions; even cult paraphernalia and purifications are made to specifications (2000: 166-67).

and orality also adopts this position: “Genres which are predominantly transmitted in written form are magical texts as it was important to keep the spell working by an exact copy of the word which aided the performance... The writing preserved the magical power inherent in the spell” (2018: 76). Ritual or magical speech is therefore linked with *performance*, which may include specific gestures and actions.

Speech is not the only means of manipulating or channelling magic in Ancient Egypt, as Ritner demonstrates. His work emphasises that action is crucial, overturning the notion within Egyptology of the spoken word as the *sine qua non* of magic (Ritner 1993: 35, 67-72). As he succinctly summarises when highlighting the centrality of physical action, “it is in the rite – and not the spell – that the essence of Egyptian magic is to be sought” (ibid. 67). This is a view shared by Hare, who echoes Altenmüller in suggesting that offerings – whether pictures or objects – could not by themselves provide the “special powers and strengths that the offering formula promises for the deceased”, but had to be imbued with these through ritual acts and utterances (1999: 159, citing Altenmüller 1982: 579, 583). Therefore, imbuing something with active potential itself involved action.

It is evident that *specific words* were intended to be accompanied by *specific acts* – and that this combination of modes was crucial to the proper operation of magic. This extends to the performance of the mortuary cult, which was ritual in nature, involving the recitation of formulaic texts *together with* the enactment of prescribed actions or gestures. Therefore, offering-related texts in tombs did not ‘magically’ provide sustenance for the dead by virtue of their presence alone. Even if they were thought to have magical potential due to the divine associations of hieroglyphs, this ability first needed to be ‘activated’ via speech and action.

The question then is whether the creative action of carving texts counted as the activation, or – seeing as recitation is related to writing in Ancient Egypt – whether the texts would need to be verbalised once finished. As Iannarilli argues, performative and magical aspects were integral to the hieroglyphic writing system (2018: 39). The activation of images must also be considered, especially as hieroglyphs are pictorial in nature.

Texts, images, and objects could be ‘activated’ and thereby possess potency, but could also ‘activate’ other substances themselves. An example of the former is the performance of the ‘opening of the mouth’ ceremony to endow a statue of the deceased (and their mummified body) with the ability to see, hear, smell, and taste via the performance of rituals (Roth 2001:

605-606). An example of the latter is the pouring of water over an inscription in order to imbue the liquid with healing power (Ritner 1993: 88, 103, 107)²⁸⁰.

The idea of activating texts, images, and objects with regard to mortuary offerings has been raised, albeit briefly, both by Anderson (2000) and Ikram (2006). Ikram discusses Old Kingdom offering vessels containing ‘fake’ fillings such as mud in lieu of food and drink²⁸¹, proposing that “magical utterance” would suffice to “compensate” for the lack of an edible offering (2006: 5). She also discusses boxes – some of which contain meat, but most of which contain model food or are empty – and again references “the power of divine utterance for transformation and reification of objects” (ibid.) For Ikram, speech plays a role in making offerings effective for the deceased, although her article does not focus on the mechanics of the “magical” or transformative utterances.

Anderson similarly implies that texts and images needed to be activated in some way by cult participants. She provides an overview of chronological changes to the motif of the tomb owner seated before the offering table, and states that the “power of magic” as well as the “influence of the written word” became increasingly important as indicated by the inclusion of the tabular offering lists with the motif (2000: 130)²⁸². Anderson suggests that the images of offerings were thought to be “as effective as the actual food and drink entombed with the deceased” once they had been subjected to “consecration rites” (ibid)²⁸³. She does not clarify what form this activation might have taken. However, the offering lists that usually accompany images of the deceased at the offering table are a useful source of information regarding this.

Offering lists occur in a long, tabular format (including a tally of the number of each item required), as well as in an abbreviated, iconographic form (the latter often above, or at the foot of, the table). The lists exemplify the overlap between writing and image: the offerings may be depicted iconographically, but can also be written out in a longer form. Even in the case of long-form tabular lists, the items can be followed by determinatives shaped like the items themselves or anthropomorphic determinatives of people offering the items. Evidence that the offering lists would have been read aloud – at least during the funeral – comes from the Old Kingdom royal Pyramid Texts, which had some oral and performative origins (Iannarilli 2018: 38-39; Morales 2016).

²⁸⁰ Ritner adds that speaking magic imbues spittle with power in a similar fashion (1993: 88).

²⁸¹ Two jars filled with mud, and two beer jars filled with ashes, were found in Merefnebef’s burial chamber and shaft (Shaft 1), respectively; a beer jar with mud filling was found in Nyankhnefertem’s chapel (Chapel 15) (see **Table A2** in Appendix, pp. 271-73).

²⁸² Anderson provides the example of 4th Dynasty ‘offering slabs’ from Giza.

²⁸³ Presumably when Anderson refers to “images”, she is including hieroglyphs.

Activation during the funeral

The offering lists in the royal Pyramid Texts developed from those in private Old Kingdom tombs, as demonstrated by Morales (2016). He takes into account aspects of ritual, recitation, and magic that shaped the offering text prior to its monumentalisation and royal use. Parts of the corpus are related to recitations and performances from private mortuary rites and personal magical practices (ibid. 71 *et passim*). Morales focuses on the *Verschriftung* (entextualisation)²⁸⁴ of the Pyramid Texts, a process via which he believes the offering lists became “divorced from human practice or scriptural *aide-mémoire*” (ibid. 74). However, even if these performative aspects fell away through the process of entextualisation for the royal domain, I do not think they necessarily did so in the private one. Morales acknowledges that the process of entextualisation or monumentalisation did not occur in the same manner in Old Kingdom private tombs, due to the restrictions of ‘decorum’ (ibid. 119). It is plausible that some oral and performative aspects of the royal offering lists were retained in the private tomb context, from which they originated.

For Hays, the “disjunction between place of attestation and place of use” regarding the royal offering lists is key (2012: 91). As they are underground, sealed off from access after the funeral, nobody could read the texts or perform the attendant rituals. Although the lists derive from operative texts, he argues that they are monumentalised forms of a rite that was once enacted above ground (ibid.) Here there seems to be a key difference between the royal and private domains: whereas the royal lists were inaccessible after the burial, the locations of the private tomb offering lists remained above ground in the superstructure²⁸⁵. I have discussed in **Section 6.iii** some occurrences of decorated burial chambers at Saqqara, in which offering lists sometimes feature, and have argued that these images functioned through a notional, rather than directly physical, connection with the above-ground offering place. Perhaps a similar situation existed for the performance of the royal cult; namely that ritual actions carried out in locations notionally linked to the pyramids (and hence to the offering lists inside) might still have been perceived to have an effect for the deceased, even if those offering lists themselves could not be accessed after the funeral.

²⁸⁴ According to Morales, this is a process of “rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting” (2016: 73, citing Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73). Through this process, Morales argues that the Pyramid Texts corpus “no longer belonged to the realm of verbal art, nor functioned as operative instructions for the priests performing rituals. Now, these inscriptions represented a new systematization of ritual practices – a novel ritual syntax – that perpetuated in stone the ultimate goal of the mortuary ceremonies: the transfiguration of the deceased into a successful spirit in the afterlife, an Akh” (2016: 72).

²⁸⁵ See Hays 2011 (particularly 128-30) for the overlap between offering motifs in royal and private mortuary cult iconography, including the offering list, deceased seated at the offering table, and ritual participants.

Crucial ritual activities occurred at the funeral as well as during the ongoing mortuary cult (Alexanian 1998: 3). The funeral was an event at which offering lists, including those in burial chambers, might have been read out. Baines suggests that some of the royal Pyramid Texts were performed during the funeral (2007: 151); as mentioned above these lists developed from private versions. He adds that the Pyramid Texts would have been “brought to life by rituals like the ‘opening of the mouth’” (2007: 151, citing Roth 2001). The ‘mortuary service’ scene from Debeheni’s 5th Dynasty tomb at Giza (**Figure 8.1**) demonstrates a close connection between action and offering lists²⁸⁶.

Image of funeral scene removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Lapp 1986.

Figure 8.1: Funeral scene from the tomb of Debeheni (Giza, LG90). Note the juxtaposition of the tabular offering list with the images of offerings, offering actions, and rituals.
Source: Lapp 1986: 147, figure 26.

Hays interprets this funeral scene as a depiction of an offering ritual that specified real actions and objects (2012: 86). He likens the juxtaposition of the offering list and images of participants to that of a photograph with its caption, as they have “an inextricable relationship” (ibid. 89). He also observes the close relation between the action, offering list, and images: “In proximity to the depictions of items being manipulated, the list is no longer a static set of things potentially available, like dishes on a menu, but things actually given and done. The pictorial images establish a visual and dynamic context of action; they provide the verb to the list’s nouns” (ibid). This is in contrast to the royal Pyramid Texts, which he concludes (like Morales) were not intended to be performed, as they had become monumentalised.

²⁸⁶ There are few examples of funeral scenes in Old Kingdom tombs; for other examples see Alexanian 1998.

Rather than attempting a reconstruction of the format and content of the funeral – Alexanian (1998), Rzeuska (2006), Theis (2011), and Wilson (1944) have already done so based on archaeological, textual, and iconographical evidence – I instead wish to highlight the funeral as a major transformative event and a point at which crucial ritual actions happen. I have already suggested in **Section 6.iii** that the text caption in Akhmahor’s decorated burial chamber (*imi hnk*, ‘place offerings’) points to ritual action being carried out in that location prior to or during the funeral.

One ritually significant action that is evidenced in texts in the burial chamber, although not shown in funerary scenes, is the placement of the sarcophagus lid²⁸⁷. Presumably this was carried out during the funeral itself, or perhaps once the subterranean area of the tomb was finished. Appeal texts on sarcophagus lids²⁸⁸ mention the ‘80 men’ (*rmṯ ḥmntyw*), embalmers (*wtyw*), and necropolis administrators (*ḥqḏw ḥrt-ntr*) in reference to them securing the lid in order to receive praise from the king, honour from the Great God, and to receive a burial in the necropolis, sometimes referring to the efficacy (*mnḥ*) of their knowledge. There is no mention of particular recitations or gestures, but there is reference to the abovementioned people reciting the invocation offering (*pṛt-ḥrw*) in the necropolis²⁸⁹. This implies that both the *action* of securing of the lid and the subsequent *recitation* of the *pṛt-ḥrw* are crucial ritual acts worthy of royal and divine praise.

The funeral was not only a point at which rituals were performed to protect and transform the deceased individual, but also an appropriate juncture at which to ‘activate’ the offering-related texts, images, and objects in the tomb via verbal and physical actions. I would also suggest that just as written prompts were used to carry out funerary rituals, so they were used to aid in the performance of ritual actions to activate the offerings in the tomb.

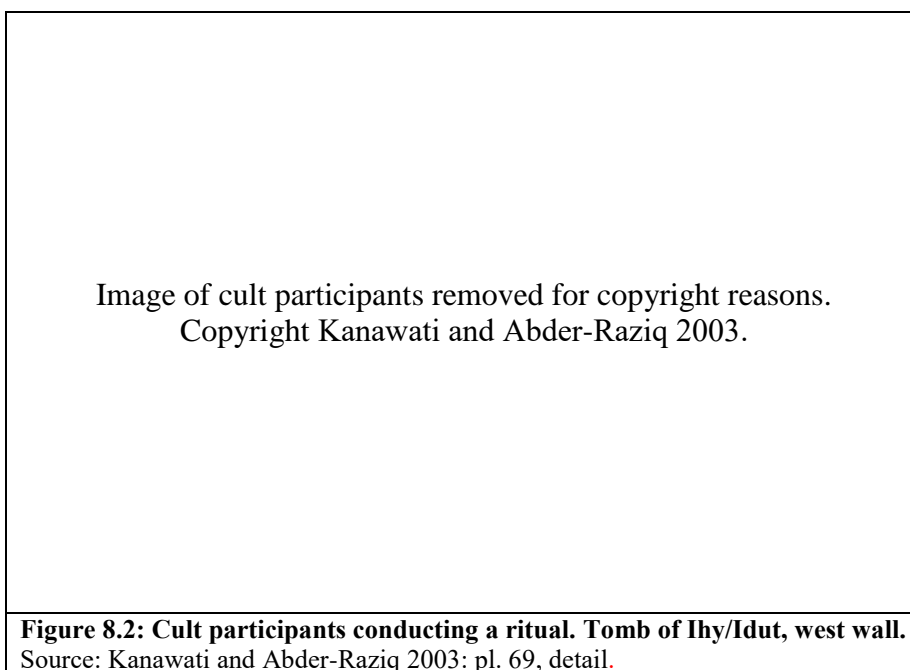
²⁸⁷ Within funerary depictions, scenes of fixing the lid of the sarcophagus do not feature to the best of my knowledge, while scenes of transporting the deceased in a coffin or sarcophagus do. For actions occurring during the funeral, see Alexanian 1998 and Wilson 1944.

²⁸⁸ Including the tombs of Ankhmahor and Khentika, the latter not being among my selection.

²⁸⁹ For example, on Khentika’s sarcophagus (see footnote above).

Written prompts and activation

Just as magical texts needed to be copied and performed precisely, so rituals had to be carried out in a certain format²⁹⁰. Consulting written sources in order to use *hkʿ* is noted in Old and Middle Kingdom texts²⁹¹. Papyrus scrolls are pictured in Old Kingdom private tomb scenes that relate to the performance of cult action, for example **Figures 8.2-8.3**, the content of which was outlined in **Section 6.iii**.



It is evident that gestures and actions are a vital part of making offerings, when speaking offering formulae (including the *hṭp-di-niṣwt* and *pṛt-hrw*) and proffering physical goods to the deceased²⁹². Priests carrying scrolls are depicted in connection with *sḥ* rituals, which relate to the ritual feeding of the deceased with food and drink specified in the offering list (far right of **Figure 8.2**, far left of **Figure 8.3**²⁹³). Some priests are involved in reading aloud and others in performing the actions of censuring, pouring, etc. (Lapp 1986: 184; Der Manuelian 1996) (for example, far right of **Figure 8.3**).

²⁹⁰ Tomb equipment may also have been made according to specifications recorded on scrolls. Hetepnephthah's appeal text (Giza, 6th Dynasty, false door, southern pillar) states: "May (burial) equipment (*pr*) be made for me in accordance with what his (i.e. the lector priest's) scroll (*=f*) specifies" (translation Shubert 2007: 45-46).

²⁹¹ Papyrus Westcar (P. Berlin 3033) includes a tale in which the magician Djedi asks for his books (see Zinn 2018: 88); the tale is set during Khufu's reign (4th Dynasty), although the papyrus dates to the Hyksos Period (Lichtheim 1975: 215). A 5th Dynasty example is an inscription of the vizier Washeph, which is discussed later in this chapter.

²⁹² See Lapp for an inventory and discussion of the gestures of the figures that accompany offerings of the *pṛt-hrw*, including comparison with gestures of anthropomorphic determinatives in offering lists (1986: 153-92).

²⁹³ The caption '*(s)ḥ*' should probably accompany the priest on the far left rather than the man in front. Some of this scene's captions were positioned incorrectly and re-carved – see Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: 55.

Image of cult participants removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998.

Figure 8.3: Cult participants conducting a ritual. Tomb of Seankhuipthah, west wall.
Source: Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: pl. 71, detail.

A study by Der Manuelian of scenes in Old Kingdom tombs showing scrolls being presented to the tomb owner also reveals a link between scrolls, priests, and funerary or cult actions (1996). Where captions labelling the identity of the figures interacting with the scrolls are present, they often include the title of lector priest (*hry-hb*), *ka* priest (*hm-k3*), or overseers of these types of priests (ibid. 564, 579, 588)²⁹⁴. The figures are holding rolled or open scrolls and are sometimes captioned as ‘giving’ (*rdit*), ‘extending/spreading out’ (*3wt*), or ‘proffering’ (*si’t*) the scrolls to the tomb owner; in some cases they are labelled as ‘reading’ or ‘reporting’ (*šd*) the contents of the scrolls (ibid. 568-69). Where the content of the scrolls is clear²⁹⁵, it is apparent that in addition to *s3h* as mentioned above, the following are included: offerings (*ndt-hr*); invocation offerings (*prrt-hrw*); reversions of offerings (*wdb-rd*); various cattle (*iwb*, *wndw*, *k3w*, *wt*); and the funerary estate (*pr-dt*) (ibid. 579-85). In the case of Ankhmahor’s tomb, burial equipment (*qrst=f*) is part of the *htp-di-niswt*; and in the double tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara, ‘sweet things’ (*iht bnrt*) (ibid.)

Significantly, the content of the scrolls frequently relates to the mortuary cult and its offerings, even listing the latter on occasion. It is feasible that the pronouncement of these items is one way in which they were activated and manifested for the deceased. These scenes might not only depict an event that occurred at the funeral, but also elicit recurrent action to be carried out as part of the mortuary cult.

Hays maintains that Old Kingdom private tomb images show that priests utilised texts on scrolls to provide cues for the performance of offering rituals, rather than reading from walls; he also asserts that the monumentalised royal offering list “played a different role: the

²⁹⁴ It should be noted that not all of the captioned figures holding the scrolls have priestly titles; neither are many of the figures labelled as relations of the deceased (see Der Manuelian 1996: 564-65).

²⁹⁵ Some of the scrolls have carved or painted hieroglyphs visible on them; others have accompanying captions that mention the content (see Der Manuelian 1996: 579-81).

cue was transformed into a static, artefactual representation of ritual action” (2012: 91). I suggest that for private tombs, both types of text were used: scrolls and inscriptions. The use of papyrus scrolls in offering rituals²⁹⁶ does not negate the use of the tabular offering lists in private tombs as *aides-mémoire* for such rituals, or indeed the use of the abbreviated offering lists by people with a lower literacy level. One of the steps in the process of entextualisation is the consultation and use of texts on perishable materials for ritual performance (i.e. ‘operative’ texts)²⁹⁷. As mentioned above, it appears that the process did not occur in the same way in the private tomb context as in the royal one. If the process of entextualisation was incomplete – or at least different – in private tombs, it is plausible that both types of text were in active use. Further, inscribed texts might have been read aloud by ritual specialists in order to activate them initially, as well as being read out by participants of varying literacy levels during the ongoing cult.

While it is difficult to prove that texts were activated during the funeral or at the point when the tomb was finished, references from tomb wall inscriptions imply that texts were recited once complete. For example, the private tomb of Senedjemib Inti at Giza²⁹⁸ indicates that texts were recited once drafted and revised (Morales 2016: 98, see footnote 125). Although referring to decrees, it points to the recitation of the final version of a text in a mortuary context. Likewise, offering lists and offering formulae (*htp-di-niswt* and *prrt-hrw*) might have been read aloud once completed, as well as during the ongoing cult, while Baines adds that biographical texts²⁹⁹ might have been recited by priests or relatives during commemorations of the deceased (ibid, citing Baines 1999: 36).

Another opportunity for the ‘activation’ of offerings would be the point of completion of the tomb and its decoration³⁰⁰. From the Old Kingdom onwards, artists were among those who conducted funerals, with ceremonial knowledge probably forming a part of their training (Bryan 2017: 5, citing Barta 1970). Chauvet convincingly argues that Old Kingdom craftsmen played a role in the ritual operation of tombs, performing rituals to create an ‘effective’ burial environment (2015).

²⁹⁶ From at least the Middle Kingdom, the offering list was associated with the god and lector priest Thoth, and may have been referred to as ‘The Book of Thoth’ (Hays 2012: 90; Willems 2001: 350). This implies that the rites associated with the offering list might have been performed from a papyrus scroll originally.

²⁹⁷ On ‘operative’ texts in the process of entextualisation, see Morales 2016: 71-73, 76-77, 95-96, 119.

²⁹⁸ Giza tomb G2370.

²⁹⁹ As noted by Morales, Helck also believes that private inscriptions would be recited (Morales 2016: 98, footnote 125, citing Helck 1972: 11).

³⁰⁰ The decoration of some tombs was never completed, but this does not undermine the idea that the images and texts that were finished would have been activated.

Craftsmen, sometimes named, feature among groups of offering bearers, including in tombs among my selection, such as that of Ptahhotep II, and they often hold the title of *ka* priest (*hm k3*), as evidenced for example in the double tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep in my selection (ibid. 63-65). The combination of titles held by craftsmen shows that they could straddle multiple spheres: in addition to their involvement with funeral rites, they could be involved in divine and mortuary ritual, as well as crafting (ibid. 67). The decoration of tombs was conceptualised as a creative act with ritual import, which helped to shape the tomb owner's post-mortem identity, and Chauvet suggests that craftsmen were thought to be able to animate objects³⁰¹ (ibid. 66-68). As already discussed, the god Ptah was both patron of craftsmen and key in creation.

Perhaps the clearest way in which craftsmen played a creative, ritual role is by fashioning statues of the deceased, which had the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony performed upon them to render them functionally effective (Roth 1992: 113; 2001: 605-607)³⁰². This was a method of activating anthropomorphic images. Although there are few references to the 'opening of the mouth' in Old Kingdom tombs, Chauvet links depictions of craft activities to this ceremony (2015: 72). Further, she discusses the ritual activation of the tomb – while explicit evidence of rituals being performed to 'consecrate' or 'activate' (*s3h*) a tomb chapel (*m3h3t*)³⁰³ comes from Middle Kingdom sources, Chauvet identifies similarities with Old Kingdom sources.

In the Old Kingdom, once craftsmen were paid for their work on the tomb, they performed a '*dw3 ntr*' (literally 'praising of god'), involving verbal and physical components, with the final result being the 'transfiguration' of the dead into an *3h* (ibid. 73-74). Chauvet highlights that the *dw3 ntr* refers to a ritual act that had to be completed as part of the exchange between the tomb owner and the craftsmen: it was key in marking the tomb as complete, making an effective environment in which the deceased could transform into an *3h* (ibid. 74-78). Craftsmen were thus paid not only for the construction of the tomb³⁰⁴, but also for the performance of rituals during or after the funeral (ibid. 78).

³⁰¹ Based on Chauvet's reading of a text from the tomb of Ankhi Inti at Saqqara, who was a priest in the pyramid complexes of Teti and Unas and held the title "the one who performs the ritual at the birth of the *sati-biti* (*bsi m3 sdt ir-ht m mswt n s3ti-biti*) among others (2015: 68). Chauvet does not discuss what the *sati-biti* may have been in this context.

³⁰² Winter (2010) discusses a similar enlivening process for statues and images in Mesopotamia. In Egypt, the opening of the mouth ceremony was also performed on the deceased. Roth (2001) argues that the ceremony began as part of funerary rituals during the 4th Dynasty, and that it was only in the 6th Dynasty that the statue ritual was incorporated into it; but cf. Otto 1960.

³⁰³ With *s3h* in this context referring to rituals performed for the chapel, rather than those (mentioned above) for feeding the dead.

³⁰⁴ For some aspects of the payment of workmen for Old Kingdom tomb construction, see Roth 1994.

What of the connection between magic and the crafting of tomb images and texts? The term *ḥkꜣ* may be used to express artistic creativity, as Te Velde suggests in his discussion of the 11th Dynasty stela of Irtysen, a draftsman of Mentuhotep II (Louvre Museum C14) (1970: 185)³⁰⁵. The idea that *ḥkꜣ* is related to hieroglyphs is referenced in the stela: “I know the mystery (*sšꜣ*) of the hieroglyphs (*mdw-ntr*), the sequence of the festal offering list (or ceremonies, *ḥbyt*), and all magic (*ḥkꜣ*), I having prepared it” (translation Bryan 2017: 4)³⁰⁶. Hieroglyphs are referred to as a secret (*sšꜣ*, Bryan: ‘mystery’), the same term used to denote the knowledge possessed by priests in the appeals to the living. Further, Irtysen states that it is because he is excellent at his craft (*iqr m ḥmwt=f*) that he has command of *ḥkꜣ*. An additional point of note is the juxtaposition here of references to hieroglyphs, offering or festival lists, and *ḥkꜣ* – it suggests that these elements are related. Considering that the roles of priest and craftsman could overlap in the Old Kingdom, and the types of knowledge at their disposal as discussed, it is plausible that the creative potential of *ḥkꜣ* in the tomb’s texts, images, and objects might have been activated initially by these people.

Access to magic

For offerings to reach the deceased and for them to be ‘effective’, it is apparent that a network of agents was in motion – one that involved the gods and king as well as individuals, alongside magic. As already noted, magic ultimately stemmed from the divine and was also dependent on it; the gods themselves were most proficient in magic. While the individuals carrying out the mortuary cult, including priests, dependents, and descendants of the deceased, all contributed to the activation and maintenance of offerings, the king and the gods played a role in permitting access to written forms of knowledge concerning magic.

Those with specialist knowledge of magic and access to written sources of it – as illustrated above in the images of cult participants holding papyrus scrolls – could presumably channel its creative potential most effectively. Baines posits that because magic is related to the ordering of the cosmos and often involved resources that were difficult or costly to obtain, the more efficacious forms of it were available only to the elite (2006: 2). The limitation and safeguarding of the knowledge of magic might be linked to the protection of elite privilege as well as to the harmful effects that particular magic practices were thought to be capable of

³⁰⁵ Barta interprets the passage of Irtysen’s stela that states, ‘As for all magic (*ḥkꜣ*), I was equipped (*pr*) with it’ as referring to ritual, rather than creative, magic (Ritner 1993: 32, footnote 142, citing Barta 1970: 78-91). The relevance to the mortuary cult remains regardless: craftsmen have specialised knowledge that relates to magic, be it of a ritual or creative nature. I do not think that these two types of ‘magical’ act – creative and ritual – should be treated as mutually exclusive.

³⁰⁶ Barta 1970 provides a comprehensive review of earlier translations of the text; see also Bryan 2017: 2, footnote 11 for further references including more recent studies of the text.

(Ritner 1993: 202-204). It must be noted that the extent to which access to magic varied between the elite and non-elite is uncertain, and it is likewise difficult to ascertain the similarities and differences between ‘state’ and ‘private’ practices involving magic³⁰⁷.

The king’s control over access to magic is exemplified in the 5th Dynasty inscription of the vizier Washptah. This relates an episode in which Washptah has a seizure and the king requests that papyrus scrolls be brought for consultation about a cure (Baines 2006: 19-20). The king permitted access to a controlled written source – the word *ššṯ* (‘secret’) is used at the start of the text. The king may even be considered the gatekeeper of written magic: writing and artistic culture were instruments of the state and this ‘high culture’ was manipulated by those in powerful social positions (ibid. 5; 2007: 13-14). However, according to Assmann, the “demotization of the royal afterlife” from the 5th Dynasty onwards opened up the possession and use of magical knowledge to the elite, for use in their own transfiguration and afterlife, the private cult being based on royal models (2005: 391)³⁰⁸.

People who held priestly roles – particularly that of lector priest (*hry-hb*) – were linked closely to magic, having access to magic texts and the knowledge of magic practices (Ritner 1993: 220-33). They could carry out ritual duties not only in the private mortuary sphere, but also in royal cults and state temples. Just as priests could act on behalf of the king when performing the daily temple rituals (thereby temporarily assuming his identity)³⁰⁹, they also assumed a divine identity when they channelled magic. Indeed, even most private magical practices required that the practitioner be assimilated to a deity (Ritner 1993: 8). Access to magic, which is required for offerings to become effective, is therefore also closely linked to the king and gods. This illustrates some of the complexities of the nexus of magical agency and the hierarchy of actors involved.

³⁰⁷ On this topic, with particular reference to execration rituals, see Ritner 1993: 182-90. See also ibid. 191-233 for a discussion of practitioners of magic in Ancient Egypt, including priests, again focusing on execration.

³⁰⁸ Hays’ 2011 article calls for an end to the idea that the afterlife was democratized, demonstrating that shared elements of mortuary texts and cult practice existed between the royal and private spheres throughout early periods. For subsequent critiques of the demotization of the afterlife, see Smith 2017 and Willems 2014. Since Assmann’s notion regarding the demotization of magic is dependent on the demotization of the afterlife, the critiques of the latter impact the validity of the former.

³⁰⁹ Hays (2009) discusses the delegation of royal agency to priests carrying out temple ritual, and considers this in terms of the priests’ personal agency and identity. He does not consider agentive forces such as magic himself, but see 19, footnotes 34 and 35, in which he alludes to its significance in ritual through citation of others’ work.

Appeals to the living (discussed in **Section 4.ii**) reference the deceased's possession of secret (*št*) knowledge and the knowledge of magic³¹⁰. For example, the text on the north side of Ankhmahor's façade appeals to lector priests who come to the tomb to carry out rituals according to the 'secret writing of the craft of the lector priest' (transliterated and translated in **Section 4.ii**), while the south side states that he himself is a lector priest and that 'never was any excellent magic hidden from me' (*n sp št hk nb ir(i) iqr*) (hieroglyphic text Kanawati and Hassan 1997: pl. 35; see also Edel 1955-64: §1094 and *Urk. I* 202.2). Merefnebef claims likewise in the inscription south of his tomb entrance, and also adds: 'I am a lector priest (who is) more expert (lit. excellent of knowing) in all the magic rituals (lit. magic things) than all (other) people' (*ink hry-hb iqr r[h ht nb(t)] hki[i] r rmt nb*) (hieroglyphic text Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 77). There are many other examples of Old Kingdom tomb owners claiming to have knowledge of magic or rituals³¹¹. As mentioned previously, the tomb owner often carried a priestly title and likely obtained such knowledge through their involvement with the royal or divine cult during life.

As Te Velde points out, it was indeed people who held special social positions who had command of *hk*, including the effective dead, king, gods, and skilled craftsmen (1970: 185). The role of craftsmen in 'activating' the ritual tomb environment, including its texts, images, and objects has been discussed above. It is plausible that craftsmen and priests were responsible for the initial activation of the tomb and its contents, as these people were perhaps perceived to be in a position to do this most effectively, due to the access that they had to specialist knowledge, and ritual and magical texts.

However, it is important to stress that this does not diminish the role of others in the ongoing mortuary cult, nor does it preclude them from carrying out the activation of offerings – through voice, gestures, and actions – presented subsequently. While the appeals to the living address priests and their 'secret knowledge' and/or 'craft', they also address 'any person' who might pass by the tomb. As the foregoing chapters have demonstrated, the tomb was designed and decorated to encourage and facilitate cult participation from groups of people with varying literacy and resource levels. Moreover, as evidenced in an appeal text on a door jamb leading into a 6th Dynasty Giza tomb, people were encouraged to pass the knowledge of how to recite an offering formula on to subsequent generations (door jamb

³¹⁰ The 'remembering' or 'forgetting' of magic by the deceased is also referenced in the Coffin Texts (see Nyord 2009: 359-61).

³¹¹ These include the text on Nyankhpepy's false door (Saqqara, 6th Dynasty) and Khui's appeal text in the passageway of his tomb (Saqqara, 6th Dynasty) (Shubert 2007: 36-37, 47-48). See Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 76, footnote 56 for further examples.

from Giza tomb G2381-2, now in Cairo Museum, JE44608; for transliteration and translation, see Shubert 2007: 38-41).

It could be argued that the texts, images, and objects were ‘activated’ during the funeral by recitation and/or physical manipulation, with the result that they could then provide ‘permanent’, ‘magical’ nourishment for the deceased – this would seem to counter my argument that ongoing action was necessary for the effectiveness of offerings. However, the analysis and discussions of the material presented in the previous chapters demonstrate that ongoing input from the living was highly desired in order to sustain the deceased, and that a powerful social impetus to do so was provided by the notion of reciprocity. Further, I will now present archaeological evidence demonstrating that ritual actions related to the maintenance of the agency of offering areas and features in tombs were repeatedly carried out over time. This action could be carried out without the need for literacy or access to specialist written sources.

8.iii. Maintaining the agency of offerings

In this section, I analyse a particular strand of evidence of recurrent offering-related activity in the tomb: multiple layers of white coating found on tomb features, areas, and offering-related ceramic forms. I suggest that white coating needed to be maintained, perhaps because it aided the operation of offerings. Its attestation on the points through which the deceased was thought to receive offerings is highly significant.

The publications of my selected tombs employ various terms to describe white coating without a precise definition of the materials involved³¹². During the Old Kingdom, white coatings were predominantly based on calcium carbonate (which can be converted into quick lime or slaked lime) and gypsum (Lee and Quirke 2000: 114). Chemical analysis of examples of wash³¹³ from three pottery forms excavated at Merefnebef’s tomb indicates that calcium carbonate was the predominant white pigment used in the pottery whitewash, usually with gypsum as a binder (Rzeuska 2006: 552). I use the term ‘white coating/coated’ as a general description, but retain and quote the original terms used in publications when referencing examples from these.

Merefnebef’s tomb complex provides an excellent illustrative example of the places in which white coating may appear since its publication provides more detail regarding this white

³¹² Exceptions to the lack of clear terminology are the ceramics reports pertaining to the tombs of Merefnebef and Nyankhneferem (Myśliwiec et al. 2004 and Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010, respectively; see also Rzeuska 2006 for a detailed study of the Old Kingdom ceramics from Saqqara, including these two tombs).

³¹³ Regarding ceramics, the term ‘wash’ denotes a mixture of colouring substance and binder, applied after firing. Binder promoted the cohesion of the coating and its adherence to pottery (Rzeuska 2006: 537).

coating than the publications of the other tombs in my selection³¹⁴; I therefore use it as a case study³¹⁵. Further, the ceramic finds from this tomb, some of which have white coating, have already been studied in detail (see *ibid.*)

Image of tomb complex removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright Myśliwiec et al. 2004.

Plan 8.1: Layout of Merefnebef's tomb complex; areas with repeated white coating are outlined in red.
Source: Adapted from Myśliwiec et al. 2004: pl. VI.

The white coated features comprise the mastaba's exterior and inner lintel, the entrance threshold of the entrance to the complex, the lower section of the decorated façade of the west chapel, the lower sections of the decorated walls in the west chapel, the sarcophagus and its lid, the burial chamber walls, and boat imagery³¹⁶ in the entrance of the west chapel (**Plan 8.1**). Moreover, white coating has been *repeatedly* applied to the offering installation

³¹⁴ An exception is the tomb of Nyanknefertem (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010); this, along with Merefnebef's tomb, was excavated and published by the Polish-Egyptian Archaeological Mission.

³¹⁵ The instances of white coating on features from this tomb and the other tombs in my selection, together with any instances of white coating on ceramics, are summarised in the Appendix (**Table A1** and **Table A2** on pp. 267-70 and 271-73, respectively).

³¹⁶ See footnote 327.

in the west wall of court 1a³¹⁷, the two offering tables and the bench in the west chapel³¹⁸, and the floor and lower areas of the walls in the east chapel³¹⁹.

There are potential practical, rather than ritual, reasons behind the application of white coating to certain areas of Merefnebef's complex. This is not to imply that these uses are mutually exclusive in all instances, but to entertain alternative explanations for their presence.

Firstly, white-coloured plaster could have been used for weatherproofing. This is only likely for the exterior of the mastaba, as plaster would protect the underlying brickwork and layers of mud and *tafla* mortar³²⁰. Other parts of the complex would not have been exposed to the elements, with the exception of the east chapel if it was not roofed³²¹. Secondly, white-coloured plaster was used to improve the surface of walls and/or to prepare them for the addition of painted decoration (see Lee and Quirke 2000: 117-18; Hartwig 2013: 14). In the west chapel, the white coating on the inner lintel of the façade was likely applied in order to prepare the surface, as hieroglyphic decoration was added here³²². Additionally, the white coated lower area of the façade of the west chapel, as well as the “band of white paint” running along the base of the interior chapel walls, might have been prepared in the same way as the decorated portions, yet left (intentionally) undecorated – areas of the decorated façade that were not finished exhibit the same background as the undecorated area (see Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 85-86)³²³.

However, this is the only area for which this is a plausible explanation. The white coating on the sarcophagus and burial chamber walls is unlikely to have been for smoothing the surfaces; the excavation report notes “whitewash” in both cases, rather than plaster, and both were undecorated (ibid. 55). Further, white coating appears on areas that were not usually decorated further, such as thresholds. Moreover, there are instances of white coating having been applied over the top of existing decoration on false doors and offering surfaces,

³¹⁷ The offering installation comprises an uninscribed limestone false door set in a mudbrick niche opposite the entrance to the west chapel; “multiple thick layers of whitewash” cover the niche and door and the area in front of it, which functioned as an offering table (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 62).

³¹⁸ “Multiple thick layers of white plaster” coat the offering tables and bench (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 61).

³¹⁹ Traces of the “several layers of white coating” on the floor are also found on the walls (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 56). As the east chapel is very small (the floor measures c. 1.20m x 3.50m), its floor was likely treated as an extension of the offering table (ibid. 56).

³²⁰ The properties of gypsum plasters and mortars differ from those made with lime. Gypsum is comparatively easier to work, but soluble in water. Contrastingly, lime is much more water resistant, but is slower to set (van Pelt 2015: 80-81). Lime plaster would likely be used for weather-proofing owing to its water resistance.

³²¹ It is unclear whether the east chapel originally had a roof (see Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 59).

³²² The sunken relief, polychrome hieroglyphs forming the offering list on the northern wall of the west chapel are executed on a white background (see Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 106).

³²³ The white coating at the base of the west chapel interior walls is described as “paint”; this contrasts with the “multiple thick layers of white plaster” that coat the offering tables and bench (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 61, 93).

including the offering tables on the west wall and “white paint” on the bench on the north wall of Merefnebef’s west chapel (ibid. 61, 102)³²⁴.

The practical explanations of surface preparation or weatherproofing therefore seem implausible apart from two specific instances, neither of which are areas to which white coating has been *repeatedly* applied (namely, the offering installation in court 1a, the two offering tables³²⁵ and the bench in the west chapel, and the floor and lower areas of the walls in the east chapel). Therefore, I now turn to ritual or cult-related factors that might underlie the appearance of white coating within Old Kingdom tomb complexes.

Before putting forward my own suggestions, I will first critically review the ideas of Kuraszkiewicz (2002), who examines objects and architectural elements with white coating from the wider Saqqara necropolis; these date to approximately the same period as my selected tombs. Kuraszkiewicz catalogues a number of inscribed objects found in the necropolis east of Merefnebef’s complex, some of which have white coating that he refers to variously as “white paint” or “whitewash”. Although the eastern tombs are severely damaged, Kuraszkiewicz has discerned multiple layers of “white paint” in the remains of several chapels, including on offering places and parts of some walls (ibid. 366). In the better-preserved rock-cut tombs to the west of Merefnebef’s complex, he has also observed that offering tables, false doors, and entrance doors were “painted white” – again, numerous coats were apparent in some cases (ibid. 367).

The evidence from the western area of the necropolis leads Kuraszkiewicz to reason that, here at least, only “ritually important areas” were painted white (ibid.) From the evidence in the eastern area and from Merefnebef’s complex, he posits that the act of colouring features white could be connected with a “restoration of their ritual purity” or, regarding offering tables and false doors, with “modification of the posthumous cult” – particularly as he believes that the applications of white coating to cult areas post-date the original decoration (ibid. 367-68). Kuraszkiewicz does not elaborate on what he means by “purity” or how it

³²⁴ Inside Merefnebef’s west chapel, there is a c. 0.35m high band of “white paint”, applied on top of a c. 1mm layer of mortar and gypsum, running along the bottom section of the walls. This continues over the two offering tables on the west wall, which feature decoration in raised relief, as well as the bench on the north wall. It also runs across the base of the northern false door on the west wall, although the southern false door finishes above the band (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 93).

³²⁵ Kemp has observed that at the New Kingdom site of Amarna (Akhetaten), a number of mudbrick platforms surrounded by trenches were built near the Great Aten Temple; the trenches had been coated in white “gypsum plaster” and showed “considerable use and maintenance”, perhaps as they held water and had to be waterproofed (2016: 5). Coatings of “thin white plaster” were applied to the large number of offering tables in this area (Kemp 2018: 3-4, 10). In one instance, “very thick” white coating had been applied at least seven times, without the previous layers having worn away or having been damaged (2019; and personal communication, 19 September 2019).

would have been lost in the first place. Perhaps he is recalling associations between the colour white and ‘purity’ or ‘sacredness’ in Ancient Egypt, also mentioned by Rzeuska (2006: 448, citing Kees 1943: 436-46).

White coating does not appear to have been added solely after modifications were made in the case of Merefnebef’s complex. It could be argued that the white paint was applied to the east chapel because it was a later addition, built following the collapse of the retaining wall that blocked access to the main west chapel (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 41-42, 248-49). It might also be suggested that white coating is found in Merefnebef’s burial chamber because it was re-appropriated – the shaft is in an unusual location, being distanced from the main chapel, which has led the excavators to reason that it was pre-existing and thus re-used by Merefnebef (ibid. 250). However, white coating is also found on his sarcophagus lid and, moreover, on features that were present from the earliest phase of the complex, including the offering tables and bases of the walls in the west chapel (ibid. 246). It must also be noted that Kuraszkiewicz has failed to record all the occurrences of white coating from Merefnebef’s complex, mistakenly asserting that, aside from the white plaster on the boat reliefs, no other traces of whitewash have been found in the west chapel.

There does seem to be evidence in favour of Kuraszkiewicz’s suggestion that white coating was used to mark spaces or features as ritually significant. I propose that the ritual significance of multiple layers of white coating lies in the role it played in maintaining the agency of key areas and features used in the mortuary cult. The areas repeatedly coated are those that have particular significance for the ongoing performance of the mortuary cult: the liminal points at which the worlds of the living and dead meet, and through which offerings were thought to be received by the deceased. The maintenance of these areas and features would have followed their initial ritual activation. It should be noted that further layers could not be applied to the sarcophagus and burial chamber as this area would be blocked off subsequent to the funeral; however, as this area was not to be entered again, it would not be subject to wear like the cult areas above ground.

It is notable that the features that have multiple layers of white coating comprise the focal offering points of Merefnebef’s tomb: offering tables, false doors, and the juxtaposed areas. Certain ceramic forms discovered in his west chapel were also found to be white coated, as mentioned in **Section 7.ii**. The number of layers of white coating present on each feature in Merefnebef’s tomb (barring the *in situ* pot stand) is not confirmed in the publication. However, Kuraszkiewicz observed wasps’ nests in between the layers of white coating on features in the western rock-cut chapels at Saqqara; there were at least four layers on features

in Seshemnefer's tomb (2002: 367). He states that "relatively long intervals of time" passed in between applications, but does not venture just how long (*ibid.*)

Further investigation of these layers would be helpful in establishing whether these coatings were made at regular intervals, or at specific points potentially linked to 'modifications' as Kuraszkiewicz suggests, and also in ascertaining the total period of time over which the activity occurred. Unfortunately, although white coating is attested in many of my selected tombs and others at Saqqara, details on the number or composition of the layers are lacking. Future research into this overlooked phenomenon is warranted, especially in light of its apparent cultic and ritual significance³²⁶.

The 6th Dynasty tomb of Inti at Abusir was mentioned in **Section 6.iii**; here I discuss the false door in his courtyard, as Bárta and Dulíková have conducted a macroscopic count of the individual layers of "white paint" that coated the door to almost half its height and the north and south walls of the niche in which it sits (2018: 57). The count revealed at least 25 layers; the authors venture "frequent 'refurbishing'" of the cult niche as an explanation for this, and state that the layers attest to the long duration of the funerary cult (*ibid.*; see also Bárta 2006: 54). Unfortunately, they do not offer further details on the total length of time over which the layers were painted, or suggest the intervals at which this might have been done. Notably, Bárta and Dulíková observe that the "white paint" was applied to the niche regardless of the existing decoration underneath (2018: 57). This phenomenon is also exhibited in Merefnebef's tomb: the white coating on the offering table almost completely obscures the carved decoration on its surface³²⁷. Kuraszkiewicz additionally found that "white wash" or "plaster" on the stelae of Kheti and Ny-Pepy was so thick that it concealed the other painted and incised decoration (even the name and depiction Ny-Pepy) (2002: 367).

In relation to Inti's tomb, Bárta concludes in an earlier study that as the layers of white coating obscured the inscriptions and decoration, "it was the place itself rather than the actual decoration that played the principal role during the cult perpetuation" (2006: 54). While I concur with Bárta that location is crucial concerning offerings, it is my opinion that

³²⁶ Some statue niches are also recorded as having white coating, for example (as mentioned in **Chapter 3**), the niche and accompanying mudbrick bench in Kaiemheset's chapel (McFarlane 2003: 25). The significance of statues and benches in the cult has been addressed already, and these features should be included in future investigations into white coating.

³²⁷ The aforementioned boat imagery in the entrance leading from court 1a into the west chapel was also obscured by white coating when discovered. Myśliwiec et al. suggest that this could be due to the "sacred character of boat journeys, in which these scenes would remind one of some entrances to cult chapels, false doors, western walls in cult chapels, as well as ritual pottery which were often painted white as well [*sic*]" (2004: 86). The authors therefore connect the white coating to the "sacred" sphere of the mortuary complex and to other white features, but do not venture why boating imagery should be treated in this way.

this phenomenon indicates the particular importance of white coating. It is especially interesting that it takes priority over decoration in some instances, considering the significant roles that decoration could play in eliciting and facilitating cult participation. One implication is that the *ritual process* of coating features in white was more important than the visual result.

In addition to white coating being found on cult focal points, it can also appear within the burial chamber, on the walls, and the sarcophagus lid, as is the case in Merefnebef's tomb. As noted above, multiple layers of coating were not added to these subterranean areas that were inaccessible after the funeral. Although Kuraszkiewicz does not include this area in his study, it can be described as ritually important. Having mentioned the notional and spatial links between the cult focal points and the burial chamber in **Section 6.iv**, I return to this subject here in order to probe the relation between these areas and white coating.

The burial chamber houses the body of the deceased and, according to some scholars, the *ka* needed to move from here to the offering locations in the tomb (see for example Allen 2014: 119)³²⁸. In theory, the *ka* would have to 'travel' from the sarcophagus in the burial chamber, up and out through the false door(s), and receive offerings at the offering table(s). These areas within Merefnebef's complex have all been found to exhibit white coating. The practice is known from several other tombs in Saqqara and the wider Memphite necropolis, as mentioned not only in the work of Kuraszkiewicz, but also of Rzeuska. The latter observes that white colouring is found in locations where the worlds of the living and dead meet, including on false doors and the 'cult' pottery placed before them, as well as on sarcophagi, burial shaft and chamber walls, and blocked up entrances to burial chambers³²⁹ (Rzeuska 2006: 448).

Rzeuska posits that the sealing and white coating of the burial chamber entrance was one of several "magical procedures" used to separate the chamber from the world of the living and to prevent the deceased's *ꜥḥ* from leaving the chamber (ibid. 452, 492). Perhaps she is drawing upon the Ancient Egyptian view that the deceased were able to negatively affect the

³²⁸ However, as noted above (p.93), there is no textual support for this deduction.

³²⁹ Merefnebef's burial entrance had been broken when the chamber was robbed and there is no mention in the excavation report of white coating (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 205). However, blocking material with white coating was found, albeit displaced, in the tomb of Nyankhnefertem (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 223). Plaster and white coating have also been found on the blocking material of burial chamber entrances of tombs that have been discovered intact (Rzeuska 2006: 444). Rzeuska proposes that containers holding remnants of "mortar" or "white-wash", which are fairly numerous in the Old Kingdom Memphite necropolis (especially in connection with burial shafts), might be connected with the white coating of the burial chamber entrance (ibid. 446-48). Additionally, chunks of limestone exhibiting drill holes were found in late Old Kingdom fill in the shared courtyard of Nyankhnefertem's chapel; the authors link this to the white coating found on the vessels and areas pertaining to the cult (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 219).

living, as evidenced through the ‘letters to the dead’ and execration rituals³³⁰. However, she suggests that white coating was used to “purify” cult ceramics and to denote that they pertained to the “sacred” rather than “profane” sphere (ibid. 515). Regarding the repeated whitewashing of Inti’s false door, Bárta refers to the process of applying white coating as “cleaning” (2006: 54).

While white coating may have been used to ‘purify’ or ‘clean’ features and areas, I have suggested in **Section 7.ii** that white coating on ceramics visually signified that they pertained to the cult and were a semi-permanent feature of an offering installation – and hence that they were of ritual significance. It is also possible that the repeated white coating on features and areas was carried out to *maintain* their ritual efficacy as well as to signal it, especially as the coating is found on liminal areas where the living and dead interacted, and in locations through which aspects of the deceased ‘travelled’ in order to reach the offering points. The facilitation of the ‘movement’ of the deceased is one explanation for ritually significant elements being maintained, and presumably originally activated, through white coating. While the confines of this study do not permit an examination of the overlap between colour, agency, and magic in Ancient Egypt, future research into this could prove fruitful.

8.iv. Magic, agency, and offerings

In simple terms, agency is “an ability to act to some effect in a particular context” (Robb 2010: 513). Magic can be considered to be a form of agency that underlies the ability of offerings to nourish the deceased. An examination of the Egyptian sources relating to the nature and creative potential of magic, as well as the verbal and physical ways in which it must be harnessed, support the idea that this force was implicated in the operation of offerings. The actions involved in realising the potential of magic are evidenced by the images, texts, and objects in the tombs, as well as through the traces of practices in the archaeological record.

In using the term ‘agency’ of magic here, I am not suggesting a conscious agency, which may be restricted to sentient beings and related to intention, but rather an effective one, which underpins the operation of offerings from the Egyptian standpoint³³¹. Additionally, as Robb argues, “...agency is not a universal capacity or quality but is defined within particular historical settings” and, as such, should be treated in a context-specific manner (ibid. 493,

³³⁰ See for example Harrington 2013: 34-40.

³³¹ See Robb 2010 for a discussion of conscious versus effective agency and for a critical examination of recent approaches to material agency; see van Oyen 2016 for a contextualisation of Robb’s approach within the wider field of material agency studies.

499). It is vital to examine the Ancient Egyptian characterisation and expression of agency in order to avoid the mis-attribution of it regarding offerings. A similar warning was issued by Ritner regarding magic: “Any activity which seeks to obtain its goal by methods outside the simple laws of cause and effect will be considered ‘magical’ in the Western sense” (1993: 69). Just like magic, agency is in danger of being assigned wherever an analyst feels it is a fitting explanation.

Winter highlights this point in her sensitive study examining the agency of the Mesopotamian ruler Gudea as presented in inscriptions related to his building projects, and as ‘distributed’ to the buildings themselves and to the statues of him installed in them (2010). She emphasises that scholars studying other cultures often *ascribe* agency to people or things where they think it seems plausible, rather than analysing agency from an *emic* standpoint, and considering how and where it is *marked* by that culture (including grammatically) (ibid. 307-308, 327-28).

Winter utilises Gell’s approach to analyse the agency pertaining to the Mesopotamian inscriptions, buildings, and statues. She draws attention to the ‘or’ in Thomas’ summary of Gell’s view, i.e. to the idea that agency can be *mediated*: “the anthropology of art is constructed as a theory of agency, or of the mediation of agency by indexes” (2010: 309; Thomas’ foreword in Gell 1998: ix)³³². To clarify, a ‘thing’ can act as an index for the agent(s) behind it – a commonly cited example is that of smoke indexing fire – with the underlying agency being inferred or ‘abducted’ from that index (see Gell 1998: 12-16). Often a human agent is inferred from the index; in the example of the fire, the actions of a person may have initiated said fire. Gell also describes artworks (or other ‘things’) as social agents, but with this caveat: “Art objects are not ‘self-sufficient’ agents, but only ‘secondary’ agents in conjunction with certain specific (human) associates...” (ibid. 17). Gell attributes agency to ‘things’, but only secondarily; for him, humans are the primary agents.

Winter emphasises that scholars often assign full agency to artworks (or other ‘things’) when they actually index an agent (2010: 309). She highlights that, according to Gell’s theory, ritual transformation is a mechanism through which ‘things’ can acquire their own agency (ibid.) She concludes that her Mesopotamian case studies support Gell’s theory and adds that “...the agency of the image is only able to be autonomous once the agency of the referent behind has been (ritually or by belief) transferred into the image in a chain linking the originating source or person to the extended or distributed material person” (ibid. 317). This

³³² Thomas, in the foreword to Gell’s work, summarises indexes as “material entities which motivate inferences, responses or interpretations” (Gell 1998: ix).

is pertinent to my study of the operation of mortuary offerings in Old Kingdom Egypt: my analysis focuses on magic as the originating source of agency that is activated in offerings through ritual actions by the living, rendering the offerings effective.

Gell's approach can be criticised for not according agency to things and humans on equal terms, or for placing too much emphasis on the agency of the former or the latter. However, in the specific case that I am focusing on, the theory that Gell adopts is a useful one for considering *how* various offering modes were perceived to be able to nourish the dead. Like Winter, I find Gell's theory useful in examining how agency is distributed. Where I depart from Winter and Gell is in considering a source of agency (*ḥkꜣ/ḥw*) that is usually non-anthropomorphic³³³.

Due to the complexities of magic, as well as the many other factors that play into the functioning of the mortuary cult (economic, social, political, etc.), it is also helpful to consider the force of magic as one of many agents, or even types of agency, operating within a network³³⁴. Although Gell's work is concerned with relationships of agency in what he terms a "nexus" of "agents" and "patients" (see 1998: 21-23 *et passim*), his approach is primarily one of cause and effect (see van Oyen 2018: 3; Robb 2010: 504-505). I do not intend to ascribe primary and secondary agency to the various participants in the mortuary cult or the force of magic; in my opinion, this would obscure the complexity of the relationships and interconnections at play.

I describe magic and its agentive nature as ultimately stemming from the divine, but I do not intend that magical agency be envisaged as proceeding from the divine in a linear 'flow' to the royal, then to the elite, to others, and onwards to the offerings themselves. Magic as an agentive force is 'mediated' or 'distributed' in the sense that it is channelled by those utilising it, but this may happen in a non-linear fashion and is dependent upon many factors and participants in a network. As revealed in this chapter, and in the above studies that have considered multiple modes of communication, both magic and ritual are highly performative. While in-depth knowledge of magic and ritual may be restricted to people holding certain social positions, there were opportunities and means for people of varying literacy and resource levels to participate in the ongoing offering cult: the living could sustain the deceased and enter into a reciprocal relationship with them, and both parties would reap the benefits.

³³³ For the force of *ḥkꜣ* as a deity, see **Section 8.1**.

³³⁴ For an overview of network and relational approaches as regards agency, see van Oyen 2018 and Robb 2010.

8.v. Conclusion

I have argued that the agency of offering modes hinged upon the performance of actions to activate their magical, creative potential. In this way, ritual and magic were intertwined. The operation of offerings involved the force of magic and a variety of individuals, all in a network of intentional and effective agency.

While the ultimate source of creative, magical force was the divine, it could be harnessed by the living. Those with access to specialised knowledge regarding magic and ritual – particularly priests and craftsmen – were in the best position to effectively activate the tomb environment and its contents, likely during the funeral or at the point at which the tomb was finished. However, in theory, anyone could participate in the ongoing cult given social knowledge. Even without literacy, an offering formula could have been learned rote, even being passed from generation to generation; and with a basic level of literacy, inscribed elements such as the tomb owner's name and/or abbreviated offering lists could be read out. Moreover, as illustrated in previous chapters, the tomb's decorative programme and built features encouraged and facilitated participation from a wide pool of people.

Offerings presented subsequently were similarly activated through speech and gesture. Magical potential that resided within the text, image, object, or recitation emerged through such 'special' action. Moreover, I have suggested that the effectiveness of the tomb environment, which allowed the deceased to be sustained in his transformed state, was maintained through repeated ritual participation by the living as evidenced through white coating on salient cult features.

The significance of the social aspects of the cult needs to be considered alongside the agency of offerings, which ultimately depended on *activity* and not *passivity*. The agency of offerings was linked to that of various groups (including the king and gods) as well as the deceased, who was active in some form, required nourishment, and who could act in the world of the living and even affect their future existence. The social aspects of the offering cult should not be downplayed as they are inextricably linked to its operation, but neither should the role of ritual action be neglected. The active potential of offerings to nourish the dead, made possible through magic, is unleashed and maintained via ritual actions that occur precisely because there is social impetus to do so.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

Kapferer, in the quote that introduces my study, describes magical practices as having their own ‘machinery’, one that exposes aspects of the psychological and social operation of humans (2002: 24). It is the latter that this thesis has highlighted – in particular the social notion of reciprocity – in respect of the mortuary cult in late Old Kingdom Egypt.

Offerings, in their various modes, are a means of mediation between the living and the dead, facilitating, materialising, and enacting their relationship. The king and the gods are also involved in the ‘network’ of relationships that underlie the cult, as they have the power to grant resources for burials and offerings, and to judge the behaviours that surround these; behaviours that affect the futures of the living and the dead.

Among these agents involved in the cult is magic itself. I have analysed magic as a creative and effective force – one integral to the functioning of the mortuary cult, as it imbues offerings in their various modes with the capability to sustain the deceased. Yet the agency of magic is dependent upon input from the living, who must harness its power and channel it from its ultimate divine source. In a compelling discussion of how the study of Egyptian mortuary religion might be taken forward, Nyord (2018) argues against using approaches that view burial goods as things that ‘magically’ come to life for use by the dead, and instead promotes relational approaches for interpreting these objects and their ability to materialise or elicit relations between things, people, processes, and places. In offering a far more nuanced understanding of offerings’ operation, I hope to have supported this endeavour, and to have challenged the view that offerings ‘come to life’ or work ‘magically’ of their own accord to sustain the deceased.

9.i Summary of aims and key findings

This study has, through an investigation of selected tombs at Saqqara, explored the operation of the mortuary cult in late Old Kingdom Ancient Egypt, focusing on food and drink offerings that were manifested for the dead via different modes – image, text, and object, as well as voice and gesture. In particular, it has challenged, and nuanced, the notion often put forward in Egyptological scholarship that imperishable offerings could ‘magically’ nourish the deceased once the perishable, ‘real’ offerings had ceased to be presented by cult participants. To this end, the key research areas of the study have been:

1. The extent to which participation from the living was vital in the provisioning of the deceased and the shape that such involvement took;

2. Whether ‘magical’ is an apt description for the nature and workings of the offering modes, whether perishable or imperishable;
3. The nature of, and relative preference for, the different modes employed to provision the deceased with food and drink offerings, focusing on ‘modal affordances’.

The study has also raised the question of how the offerings were thought to be able to nourish the dead from an Egyptian perspective, proposing a way of pursuing the issue of relative ontologies – the nature of offerings versus that of the deceased – further in future.

The approach taken has been one of ‘thought experiments’, allowing the author to ‘think through’ the modes of offering (texts, images, objects, voice, and gesture) utilised in the mortuary cult. Different strands of theory have been brought to bear on the use and nature of the various offering modes, as well as the participants’ roles in the cult. One of the aims of this study was to establish various ‘building blocks’, comprising theoretical approaches to different aspects of the complex topic, in order to facilitate further research on its various aspects; it was beyond its remit to provide an all-encompassing theory of how the cult operated. Yet it is my conclusion that these building blocks are compatible with one another and can be combined in a multimodal, social semiotic approach with phenomenological and cognitive aspects. Not only does this provide an enhanced understanding of the Egyptian perception and operation of offering modes within the mortuary cult, but I suggest that it could be adapted and applied to related complex research problems (see **Section 9.ii**).

In addition to building this approach, my study has brought to light key findings relating to the operation of the cult. These findings can be summarised according to four principle themes, as below. The contribution of the theoretical strands to the investigation is also highlighted here.

Reciprocity

This study has established that the living played a number of crucial roles, particularly as cult participants and tomb visitors were party to a reciprocal relationship with the dead. Reciprocity acted as a linchpin in the mortuary cult – a notion that justified and shored up its ongoing performance. Its pervasiveness in the operation of the mortuary cult leads me to suggest that it is worth considering in future in relation to other Egyptian phenomena.

The living and dead were linked by reciprocity. This notion is revealed through the appeals to the living and biographies inscribed in tombs: these indicated to the living that if they desire to have their own post-mortem cult, they should provision the tomb owner; just as the tomb owner has lived a good life, which may have included giving offerings to the dead, so

too should the living behave in this way. Another benefit that the living would gain is support from the deceased in the necropolis and the divine court of the afterlife. The texts warn the living that should they act inappropriately at the tomb, the opposite will occur.

Mortuary cult performance, at least at the elite tombs studied, was inextricably linked with hierarchy as well as reciprocity. I have illustrated that reciprocity also featured in the *ḥtp-dī-nīswt* offering formula texts, which relate that the king and the gods have given permission for the deceased to have a burial place and to receive offerings. The implication is that the dead behaved well in life and fulfilled their duty, which in the case of elite tomb owners likely included rendering particular services to the king and gods – the tomb owner's roles are evidenced in the titles that accompany their name and their deeds often detailed in biographical texts. Moreover, *ḥtp-dī-nīswt* texts can denote that the tomb owner is entitled to a share in the offerings that were presented in royal or divine contexts and then redistributed to be used in the cults of the elite, illustrating another social link enacted through offerings.

The performance of the mortuary cult at the tomb provided a social and physical arena for family and dependents to maintain their existing relationship with the deceased, and an opportunity for any passer-by to demonstrate their good behaviour by providing offerings. Family and dependents could also express the fulfilment of their duty in an additional way, being presentified permanently in the tomb as carrying out offering actions by way of depictions on the tomb walls or in the form of 'serving statues'. Priests are another group with interests in reciprocity. They were employed to carry out the cult professionally and could count such deeds among their own appropriate conduct – some *ḥtp-dī-nīswt* texts relate that priests who carry out the mortuary cult rituals will be beloved of the gods and king, and so their actions not only result in payment, but also royal and divine favour. Although references to embalmers and necropolis administrators occur in only one appeal text from among my selected tombs, it appears that these groups would also gain the favour of the king and gods in return for carrying out their duties.

Reciprocity was a driving force behind the continuation of cult performance. The emphasis placed on it underscores that a reliance on 'magical' offerings was not a desirable situation for the living and dead, as this would deprive the living of the opportunity to gain benefit from showing their appropriate behaviour towards the deceased, and rob the dead of receiving the preferred perishable offerings. Before summarising the effectiveness of different offerings, I will turn to the design of the tomb, as this also supports the conclusion that the living should be involved in the cult over the long term, at least ideally. Crucially, the reciprocal relationship between the living and dead extended to the way in which the

tomb was designed – not only regarding the abovementioned content of the tomb texts, but also in relation to images and built features.

Tomb design

I argue that the tomb was a purposely designed environment relevant to the living as well as the deceased, being crafted to elicit visitors to present mortuary offerings and to facilitate those actions. It was not only ‘decorations’ such as texts and images (in relief and in the round), but also objects and installations including false doors, offerings tables, benches, basins, and cult pottery that promoted and permitted the sustenance of the dead by the living. Different communicative modes were also incorporated into the decoration, providing salient information to people of varying literacy levels so that they could carry out ritual actions and provide offerings. However, literacy and specialist knowledge might have been required for the most precise and effective performance of some rituals – likely for the initial activation of the tomb environment and its contents.

While the living might be described as an audience for tomb decoration, even this role was an active one, as their gaze was required to establish reciprocal sight between themselves and images of the tomb owner, and even to ‘complete’ certain scenarios implied by imagery.

a) Physical affordances

The concept of affordance has proved useful for investigating both the physical and communicative possibilities of the offering modes (for the latter, see below). The examination of physical affordances, which stem from the realm of phenomenology, permits us to consider the ways in which offering-related installations and features were used, or were desired to be used, by tomb visitors and cult participants. As scholars posit that the performance of the offering cult did not usually last beyond a few generations, it was vital to ascertain whether the tomb fittings and decoration were designed to facilitate the active use of offering points. This study concludes that indeed they were. Ideally, the living would continue to carry out offerings and rituals at the tomb, the latter being necessary to ‘activate’ the food and drink. It was important that the living continue to come to the tomb to provide offerings: this study has ascertained that perishable food and drink was preferable to imperishable offerings, and certainly to words and gestures alone.

The mortuary cult required special actions to be carried out – not only gestures with the hand, which could be accomplished without additional equipment, but also (ideally) the placement of foods and the pouring of liquids, among other actions. Offering points could be installed in outer as well as inner areas of the tomb complex. This not only provided more

points at which offerings could be made, but those in the outer areas were easier to access, especially if a tomb had many chambers and a convoluted path to the offering chapel proper.

The design of surfaces and receptacles within the tomb complex, which afforded placing and pouring, enabled these actions to be carried out. Further, equipment could be stored in designated rooms, and/or placed close at hand on the benches that often accompanied offering tables and false doors. Offering tables afforded the placement of solid offerings, and wear on the surfaces of some examples attests to this. Larger basins afforded the containment of water for cleaning and purification, but it is unclear whether they were used in the preparation of meat offerings.

The sacrifice of animals to provide meat offerings is attested in tomb imagery and also archaeologically by occasional finds of animal remains. Water basins, potential tethering points, and areas large enough to afford processing may feature in tombs. The viability of slaughter and butchery being carried out in smaller, narrower tombs is questionable, but outer areas such as courtyards would permit such activities. Another possibility is that animals were led into the inner areas of tombs, tied to tethering points, and presented visually and ritually as offerings to the presentified tomb owner. Ritual activities with animals might have been carried out in conjunction with statues; more viably in outer areas, where statues were likely present as evidenced by instances of niches that would accommodate statuary.

Statues were sometimes combined with offering tables; both types of installation could be raised up and accessed via steps, which prompted visitors to approach in a linear fashion and, in the case of large-scale statues, permitted closer contact with the imagery. A reciprocal, visual connection between a visitor and the image of the tomb owner was significant, whether 3D, 2D, or in relief, since the image of the deceased acted to presentify the deceased and manifest them in the tomb space so that offering rituals could be carried out. The living therefore played an important role as an active audience. Visibility and reciprocal sight could be controlled by the living in some instances by operational doors that concealed or revealed statues set in niches: the living could instigate a physical connection between themselves and the dead. Similarly, the living might have been able to glimpse, through carefully positioned squints, statues of the deceased sealed in the serdab(s) of the tomb. Even if the lighting in the tomb was inadequate to do so, or if the serdab was sealed completely, it is possible that visitors would be aware of the existence of the serdab and its contents, and thereby of an implicit presence of the deceased within the space. Moreover,

rituals including censuring and the presentation of offerings could be performed in front of and through serdab squints, regardless of whether the statues within were visible.

I have demonstrated that while false doors did not afford opening and closing, their form alluded to 'functional' doors through representations of double door leaves and bolts. The doors, when decorated with images of the deceased and their name, helped to presentify the tomb owner within the tomb space. Moreover, the doors constituted a particular type of threshold – a liminal space through which the dead could 'receive' offerings. Decorative features that alluded to 'functional' doors suggested that offerings, and perhaps the deceased, could permeate them. Notably, the movement of the offerings or the deceased might have been perceived to be ritually controlled by cult participants, as the door leaves and bolts appear 'operable' from the outside, namely the side on which the living stood.

b) Movement

As mentioned above, installations could be designed to direct the movements of cult participants and visitors toward them via steps. Their placement could also be linked to movement through space, for example by situating a statue within the sight line of a visitor as they enter a space. Moreover, images that formed the decorative programme played a number of key roles: signalling the identity and status of the tomb owner, and guiding the movement of visitors within the tomb.

Images and texts on the tomb façade signalled the identity of the tomb owner to passers-by, yet this relied on the visitors having at least a basic literacy level in order to read the name and titles of the deceased. However, literacy would not be required to understand images of the tomb owner, save a basic social knowledge of their context. As the direction in which the tomb owner is depicted (facing into or out of the tomb entrance) varies with time, the idea that the images of the tomb owner on the façade 'invited' visitors into the tomb is not entirely tenable. Regardless, an elaborately decorated tomb façade likely played a part in signalling the deceased's status as well as identity to passers-by, thereby attracting attention in a crowded necropolis, indicating the position of the entrance itself, and perhaps encouraging offerings by virtue of the status of the tomb owner.

In addition to signalling, I have argued that images could play an action guiding function, indicating to visitors the types of offering-related actions that they should ideally carry out inside the tomb. Among the depictions on tomb walls are images of priests and cult personnel carrying out particular offering and ritual actions, including the presentation of food and drink to the tomb owner, the placement of equipment such as offering tables, and

the use of items such as offering vessels, censers, and papyrus scrolls. Further, I have suggested that abbreviated and tabular offering lists served as prompts for visitors of the types of offerings and actions that they should carry out, or as an *aide-mémoire* for cult professionals. The ability of people to utilise these lists depended on their literacy level and perhaps level of specialist ritual knowledge, although as the lists often took the form of logographic hieroglyphs accompanied by a numeral, they might have been more accessible than other genres such as prose. The aforementioned images of actions often occur in close proximity to offering lists, motifs of the tomb owner seated at the offering table, and offering points, so they likely ‘reinforced’ communications to the viewer regarding the types of offerings that should be given, and the place and manner in which this should be done.

I have proposed that depictions of offering bearers and cult participants played a movement guiding role, directing visitors towards the main offering point(s) of the tomb. In the main offering room, these figures face towards the false door and/or offering table itself, while in subsidiary rooms they face towards the main offering room. This movement guiding role was particularly important in larger tomb complexes with many rooms, which may have been harder to navigate unless the visitor was already familiar with the layout. It is important to note that in some instances, not all of the rooms in a large tomb complex were decorated (or were perhaps unfinished), which meant that a hiatus in the ‘guiding’ figures existed. Nevertheless, when depicted, the offering bearers and cult participants are consistently represented as if travelling toward the offering points. Further, in such cases, the depictions would still draw the eye toward the offering point(s) even if they did not direct the visitors’ entire route through the tomb.

Leading on from this, I have suggested that the images of offering bearers and cult participants could impart an impression of motion on the viewer, which directed the eye and perhaps also encouraged the movement of the visitor in that direction. Research in cognitive neuroscience and vision studies offers insight into how even static images can achieve such ‘implied motion’ and I have applied this to examples from my selected tombs with a focus on broken symmetry and some examples of forward lean exhibited by offering figures. I have proposed that the offering bearer and cult participant images possess a level of dynamism and motion. The application of cognitive neuroscience (specifically visual studies) in my work highlights that Egyptian art can make use of sophisticated visual devices or properties that imply motion. Although neurological research sheds light on why visual phenomena cause particular effects on the viewer, it was not my intention to take a reductionist stance. I have aimed to maintain a focus on the social issues of how and why

visual features were employed in the specific case of the Egyptian mortuary cult. This approach is also evident in my use of multimodal social semiotics.

In my view, it was not the movement of visitors through the tomb that animated the offering modes present within the space; I argue that the activation of offering modes was effected through ritual actions involving the harnessing of magic. However, I have proposed that the living could actualise the offering-related events depicted on the walls by enacting them. Moreover, at offering installations in the superstructure, the living could act as counterparts to offering scenes depicted in decorated burial chambers, which did not bear depictions of living people or animals, yet sometimes featured offering table scenes and offering lists. While the burial chamber was inaccessible after the funeral, it was notionally linked to the false door(s) and/or offering table(s) positioned above ground. The deceased, although not pictured either, was nonetheless physically present via their corpse.

In carrying out the active roles of moving, viewing, and carrying out ritual actions within the tomb complex, the living were enacting and maintaining social relationships. I have posited that they would become part of the groups of participants depicted on the walls, giving them a sense of social belonging and cohesion. As is the case with reciprocal sight, this is a phenomenological dimension of the performance of the mortuary cult – one that reflects embodied practice and the role of ritual action in social reproduction, as the rituals did not just reflect social structures and norms, but continually (re-)created them. Cult participants therefore played a vital role in fulfilling the tomb's purpose as a site for the remembrance of the deceased, the maintenance of their social identity, and the sustenance of their post-mortem existence. The complex relationship of reciprocity involved the king and the gods, but it was the actions of the living that were crucial to the continuity of the cult.

Modes and communication

There is an interesting tension between the notion of reciprocity and that of hierarchy in relation to the operation of the mortuary cult and the design of the tomb. This has become evident through my exploration of the use of multiple modes in the cult as well as the affordances of those modes.

Although reciprocity implies a mutual relationship, the social status of the living and the dead was not necessarily equal, as in theory any passer-by could make an offering at a tomb. To read the texts on the tomb façade a visitor would need a certain literacy level: in order to read the tomb owner's titles, the offering formula as inscribed, or an appeal text, a greater level of literacy would be needed; but the ability to pronounce the name of the tomb owner

would be the minimum required if a visitor could recite a basic offering formula learned by rote, inserting the relevant name into it. Inside the tomb, offering lists also relied on the reader being able to understand at least logographic hieroglyphs and numerals.

When basing a view of the mortuary cult solely on the tomb texts, it would appear at first that only literate people could provide effective post-mortem offerings. However, looking through the lens of modal affordance offers another view. Modal affordance, like physical affordance, is one of the tools within a multimodal social semiotic analysis kit and it enables the communication possibilities of various modes to be considered. In applying a multimodal social semiotic approach to the offering modes present or described in selected tombs, my study has revealed that issues of social hierarchy, as well as the drive toward reciprocity, are accommodated by modal affordances. The tomb decorative programme incorporates different modes that communicate information to visitors about how and why to participate in the cult, while the offerings themselves may be presented via different modes, thus permitting people with varying levels of literacy, and perhaps ritual knowledge, to take part in provisioning the deceased and hence in reciprocity.

Complicating this view is an apparent contradiction between the literacy levels of potential cult participants and the need to perform rituals precisely, perhaps according to written ritual instructions; and while appeals to the living may include ‘anybody’ in their addressees, seemingly incorporating all people in the pool of potential cult participants, literacy would be required in order to read such an address. It is plausible that visitors were expected to participate according to their means and ability. Basic recitations, gestures, and actions could have been passed on orally through generations without the need for literacy, in order that offerings could be effectively presented to the dead. However, in elite tombs, key texts, images, and objects would perhaps have been initially activated by professionals (priests and craftsmen) once the tomb was finished, or during the funeral. This does not preclude the need for ongoing participation from the living; I have illustrated that ritually salient areas and features in the tomb may have been maintained through repeated white coating, a substance and action that might itself have had an agentive nature.

Certain modes could communicate information in ways that other modes could not. In addition to images being able to convey messages regarding the cult to people with low or non-existent levels of literacy, images in the round afforded the impression of a body with volume and, moreover, could meet the viewer’s gaze with both eyes enabling reciprocal sight, which is rare for 2D or relief images in Ancient Egypt. Further, objects were able to materialise social links between the living and dead, such as in the case of so-called serving

statues, which might have presentified their donors, and ceramic forms used to provide offerings. To subsequent visitors, the presence of discarded ceramics would materially evidence that the tomb owner had been offered to before, attesting to both the deceased's worthiness and to the previous visitors' fulfilment of their duty. Ceramic offering forms positioned permanently in front of offering points might have functioned similarly, while also encouraging food and drink to be placed in them. The affordance of portability meant that offering ceramics and other equipment could be moved around the tomb whilst rituals were carried out, and could even be deposited in and around the tomb to act as visual reminders or evidence of activity for subsequent visitors.

My analysis of aspects of tomb design through a multimodal social semiotic lens revealed that various communicative devices were used: not only 'implied motion' as mentioned above, but also 'framing' and 'conceptual metaphor'. Conceptual metaphor, especially 'big = important', was also employed to indicate the relative significance of certain motifs, such as that of the tomb owner seated at the offering table. Crucially, all modes used in tomb decoration were designed to impart the message that *this is an environment in which sustenance is to be secured for the deceased*. Framing is a notable feature used to draw the viewer's attention to salient visual information regarding the offering cult, whether this is in text, image, or object form. It guided the eye of the viewer to the key offering points in the tomb. Symmetry was used as a framing device, while broken symmetry was employed to lend a sense of motion to imagery.

The utility of employing aspects of cognitive neuroscience alongside multimodality is that while the former explains how and why particular visual devices or layouts have particular effects on the eye, the latter focuses on how and why such devices were used. The combination of both allows for a fuller understanding (neurological and social semiotic) of the workings and deployment of visual communication. This is further enhanced by phenomenological considerations as discussed already.

This study has illustrated that a hierarchy of modes existed in relation to nourishing the dead, whereby perishable food and drink offerings were most preferable, while gestures when accompanied by verbal recitation were also acceptable. However, I have brought to light that even the so-called voice offering (*pṛt-hrw*) ideally had a physical dimension. Both voice offerings and perishable offerings were to be accompanied by specific gestures. It is therefore evident that combinations of modes were intended to be used together in order for offerings to be effective. This relates offerings to magic, as the latter was harnessed likewise through both words and actions.

Magic and agency in Ancient Egypt

I utilised Gell's approach to agency (1998) in my study – it is my opinion that the nuance of primary and secondary agency accords with the Egyptian perception of the mechanics of offerings, as well as the general operation of magic. I have argued that offering modes did not have inherent agency (i.e. primary agency), but that their power to have an effect for the deceased originated with the creative potential of magic, which had to be channelled via ritual action and recitation (i.e. secondary agency, made possible through human intervention). In Egyptian thought, magic originated ultimately from the divine, being an effective, powerful force that was coeval with creation itself. Gell's theory accords with the distribution, or rather mediation of, agency in Egypt. I do not suggest that magical agency should be conceived of as flowing in a linear fashion from the divine, to the royal, to the elite, and then into the offerings, as it was just one agent or type of agency within a complex network, which in total constituted the operation of the mortuary cult. Magical agency should be considered alongside the aforementioned notion of reciprocity, as well as issues of social hierarchy and differential access to knowledge and resources.

The creative potential of magic cannot be imbued into offering modes without certain actions, both physical and verbal. Gesture and speech are crucial to the workings of magic and to the operation of offerings. Even though the terms *ḥkꜣ* and *ḥw* are not used to describe the nature of offerings in the sources that I have examined, the similarities between the ways in which magic is harnessed and the ways in which offerings must be presented indicate that magic and offerings are connected. Further, the two terms sometimes do appear in connection with the priests' and tomb owners' specialist knowledge. Some of the methods utilised in magical practices in general, such as the speaking of particular texts aloud and in a precise manner, as well as making particular gestures and movements, implies that magic was indeed a force involved in activating offerings to render them effective for the deceased.

The ritual transformation of offerings into effective agentive ones could well have occurred either when the tomb was finished, likely carried out by craftsmen who had ritual knowledge, or during the funeral, by personnel who held priestly roles. The 'opening of the mouth' ritual, performed on anthropomorphic images (particularly statuary) is one way in which modes within the tomb were activated, and I have posited that ritual actions to activate non-anthropomorphic objects, images, and even texts also occurred. An example of the former is the white coating often found on offering-related ceramic forms, as well as offering tables, false doors, and other liminal points including within the burial chamber; this was seemingly maintained through additional layers.

It appears that a level of ritual knowledge was required to carry out activation. The possession of ‘secret’ knowledge, which may be of a ritual or magical nature, was something that tomb owners frequently claimed to have as described in their tomb inscriptions. This raises the dual issue of social status and access to knowledge, which is also relevant as regards literacy. If texts had to be recited precisely in order to channel magical agency into offerings, it would seem that only those with access to such texts, and the capability of reading them, would be able to make effective offerings. Further, if the texts, images, and objects within the tomb complex could be activated by professionals and knowledgeable persons at the funeral or when the tomb had been completed, this leads to the assumption that the bringing of perishable offerings to the tomb would be rendered unnecessary.

However, this study has illustrated that perishable food and drink was the preferred offering type for the deceased. Moreover, the different modes through which offerings could be presented made it possible for those with varying literacy levels and even resources to participate in the cult (and hence reciprocity): those who came to the tomb without perishable offerings or physical objects could make gestures and recite a basic offering formula in order to provision the deceased. The various modes with which the tomb was decorated and fitted out also permitted information regarding the cult to be communicated to a wide pool of potential participants.

A more nuanced picture of agency – especially regarding the magical nature of offerings – has emerged due to this study, which has also highlighted the importance of emic versus etic understandings of the concepts of agency and magic. All offerings were magic by modern, Western standards, as whether perishable or imperishable, they were considered to be able to sustain a dead person – something that appears illogical by such standards. Scholars must be careful to distinguish between, or at least clarify, whether the term ‘magical’ originates from their own point of view, or whether it is evidenced in the culture under discussion, and likewise regarding the ascription of the term ‘agency’. Social considerations – especially status, literacy level, and access to knowledge and material (offering) resources – shaped the modes that were present in the tomb to communicate key information about cult performance to visitors. Furthermore, they also shaped the variety of offering modes that could be presented to the deceased and considered effective in sustaining them indefinitely.

Should the living cease to perform offering actions at the tomb, it is unclear whether, according to Egyptian beliefs, the existence of the deceased would end. It could be surmised that the images, texts, and objects placed within the tomb, having been ritually activated, would continue to provide food and drink sustenance for the dead in the absence of input

from the living. However, the evidence of maintenance within the tomb, particularly the repeated white coating of salient features, implies that ongoing action by visitors and participants was necessary. Moreover, the hierarchy of offerings demonstrates that perishable offerings were the most desired – and perhaps the most effective – at nourishing the deceased and these could only be supplied by the living.

9.ii. Implications and future research

The key findings of this study, together with the building blocks of theory utilised, comprise a number of contributions relevant within and outside of Egyptology.

The overarching methodology of this study has been one of ‘thought experiments’ and ‘thinking through things’, whereby the material under investigation has to an extent dictated the terms of its analysis. In this vein, it employed a number of strands of theory in order to break down the complex topic of the ‘magical’ operation of the mortuary cult, and to address the research questions reiterated above. The space and time limitations of this study prevented the examination of all of the aspects of the mortuary cult (for example, economic, legal, or logistical factors of providing offerings), and therefore the drawing together of all of these into a single, unified framework to understand the totality of the offering cult.

However, as mentioned above, it is possible to combine the ‘building blocks’ of theory without friction. Applying a multimodal, social semiotic approach, together with phenomenological and cognitive aspects, has proved fruitful for generating a deeper understanding of the mortuary cult. There is utility in carefully combining theoretical approaches to unpick complex phenomena such as the operation of the mortuary cult. However, this must be sensitively done as such an approach could prove unwieldy, especially if each has its own terms and if there are contradictions between the theoretical strands.

Adaptations may also need to be made: for example, in using multimodal social semiotics I had to take into account the significant overlap between text and image in Ancient Egypt, which contrasts with the clear distinction between image and text sometimes drawn in social semiotics (see Kress 2005 and Pink 2011). We must remain mindful of our (etic) perceptions of text and image – and indeed all modes – versus the (emic) conceptualisations of the Egyptians. As Kress warns, “The more pronounced the cultural differences, the greater are the differences in the resources of representation and in the practices of their use” (2010: 8).

By approaching the research questions from different angles, employing various approaches, I hope to have revealed a richer picture of the mortuary cult than if a single theory had been

utilised. Although a multi-faceted approach might run the risk of being too diverse, disjointed, and expansive, when it is adopted in a considered manner and tailored to the research questions it nonetheless allows underlying or recurrent themes to emerge. The major themes that have come to light through my study having been discussed above, as have the individual contributions of each theoretical strand to its particular set of research questions. It is my hope that such a combined ('building block') approach may be useful to apply to other complex research problems in future.

Similarly, my study brings to light a number of further research questions, which lie outside of the limits of this work, but which may form the basis for future work. The most promising of these are:

Agency of material and visual properties

Leading on from my discussion of white coating as marking out ritually salient features and areas, as well as potentially facilitating the 'movement' of the deceased, a promising line of enquiry would be the study of colour as an agent, or as having 'active' properties. Visual features including colour are often considered as 'symbolic' or 'aesthetic' in Egyptological scholarship. In my opinion, such active properties are overlooked – like object agency and magic, they may appear illogical to modern Western thought. The interplay between agency and visual or material properties, and the harnessing of these properties in ritual/magical acts is a subject that I propose to research in future.

Relative ontologies

If a person can be nourished by images, texts, and objects activated through magic, then what is the nature of a body, according to Ancient Egyptian thought? To approach this question, the intersection of offerings, communicative modes, magic (*ḥkꜣ*), and the ontological nature of the deceased could be investigated. I would adapt the existing multimodal social semiotic approach, with a phenomenological component addressing conceptions of the body (rather than physical affordances), drawing particularly on Nyord's recent work on the *ka* concept (2019), which notes the connection of the *ka* with aspects covered in this study, including creation, magic, and potentialities. Another aspect that dovetails with ontological considerations is the presentification of anthropomorphic versus non-anthropomorphic images: further research would enhance our understanding of the relative ontologies of people versus 'things' in Ancient Egypt.

The development of the notion of reciprocity over time

Scholars suggest that the sustenance of the dead became less reliant on mortuary cult activities after the Old Kingdom. If this were the case, the living would no longer be able to reap future benefits resulting from carrying out their ‘duty’ to the dead in that way. It is possible that other ways to demonstrate appropriate behaviour in life emerged in tandem with changes to the provisioning of the deceased.

Death as a social process

As discussed in this study, one function of images, texts, and objects was to materialise aspects of the deceased’s identity – both as a living person and as a transformed being. These were actively viewed by the living, and thus helped to maintain the memory of the tomb owner. Similarly, offering-related objects deposited in and around the tomb materially exhibited and engendered connections between the living and the dead. Ultimately, offering-related actions and rituals in the tomb constituted an enactment of the relationships between the two parties.

Dying is fundamentally a social process, not just a biological one (see Kellehear 2007; Robb 2013). The cult provided a forum for negotiating the various transitions that the living and dead undergo: through the performance of rituals, the deceased body is transformed into an ontologically different type of being; while the living experience a period of adjustment involved in the loss of a loved one. As such, the mortuary cult, involving ritual and magical acts pertaining to offerings, allows such transitions to be played out.

As demonstrated in this study, the mortuary cult was a social phenomenon that required input from the living in order that the deceased remain sustained. However, since such participation was vital, questions remain regarding what happened when the living finally stopped carrying out cult actions. I suggest that at this point, the tomb owner could be said to witness a ‘social death’: they would go beyond immediate social inclusion and the reach of living memory. In my introduction, I proposed that focusing only on the nature of offerings as ‘magical’ or ‘real’, ‘permanent’ or ‘temporary’, obscured the cult as a social phenomenon that articulated the relationship between the living and the dead. A key future research avenue is the study of the mortuary cult, as well as the modification, re-use, and usurpation of tombs, as components in the *protracted social process of dying*.

9.iii. Final summary

To summarise, this study has accomplished its main aims. It has established that participation by the living in the mortuary cult was crucial for the sustenance of the deceased – the living were not only offerors, but also an audience for the visual programme of the tomb environment, which was designed in order to elicit and enable them to carry out the necessary ritual actions. Cult participants entered into a mutually beneficial relationship with the dead, with their actions at the tomb playing into the vital notion of reciprocity. This social, reciprocal relationship also involved the king and the gods, particularly as regards the provision of an elite tomb and its share in redistributed offerings.

A variety of different communicative modes were employed in the tomb to impart salient information about cult performance to tomb visitors. Further, multiple modes of offerings could be used in order to nourish the dead, therefore enabling people with varying levels of literacy, ritual knowledge, and resources to participate in the cult – actions from which both they and the dead would benefit. There was an apparent preference of the deceased for perishable over imperishable food and drink offerings.

The offering modes themselves did not act independently of human input: they did not have inherent agency, but had to be imbued with it via the creative and effective potential of the force of magic. While a person's ability to channel this force relied on a level of specialist knowledge, basic recitations and ritual acts could be performed if learnt by rote or if visual cues within the tomb were followed. The repeated white coating on offering-related features and liminal areas is among these ritual acts, testifying to the maintenance of the effective tomb environment by the living. This supports the idea that ongoing action by the living was crucial to the longer-term operation of the mortuary cult.

Although the material that I have examined does not reveal the use of the Egyptian terms for 'magic' (*ḥkꜣ/ḥw*) in reference to offerings specifically, the knowledge of it and access to it is connected with tomb owners and those with priestly roles. Literacy is another form of privileged knowledge, and a certain level would have been required to read ritual texts accurately and activate the inscribed versions in the tomb space. The creative potential of magic that is expressed in other textual sources, as well as similarities in the methods through which magic and offerings are enacted, indicate that this is the force perceived by the Egyptians to endow offerings with the ability to sustain the dead indefinitely. However, its potential had to be realised and maintained by the living.

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Appendix

Table A1: Summary of white coating on features from the selected tombs³³⁵

Tomb owner(s)	Location of white coating on internal tomb features	Notes
Akhethotep and his son, Ptahhotep II	—	—
Ankhmahor	Room VII: Remains of “hard and coarse creamy-pink plaster” on all wall and pillar surfaces (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 23).	Likely preparation for unfinished decoration (see Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 54-55). This type of coarse plaster was often used to repair or prepare surfaces, on top of which a cream coloured gypsum plaster was applied prior to decoration ³³⁶ .
	Burial chamber of Shaft 1: Remains of “white wash” on internal side of burial chamber entrance wall (ibid. 24).	
Ihy (re-used by Idut)	Limestone sarcophagus, burial chamber: Interior is coated with “white gypsum” (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003: 41).	
Irukhaptah	—	—
Kaiemheset	Façade and large niche cut into northern end of façade: Covered with “mud plaster”, overlaid with “tafel plaster”, and then “whitewashed with gypsum”. The niche features “evidence of several additional coats of gypsum” (McFarlane 2003: 24).	
	Recessed entrance to chapel, and two niches (one either side of entrance): All are “covered in mud and tafel plasters and the whitewashed” (ibid. 24).	
	North wall of room IA (offering chapel) and niche cut into it: Originally “coated right to the floor with mud and tafel plasters and	

³³⁵ As reported in the tomb publications. Excludes mortar, plaster, or other coatings where the colour is unspecified, but includes coatings whose colour could be considered close to white. Excludes mortar and plaster used for repairing damaged or uneven surfaces, as well as that used as a background for decoration.

³³⁶ See McFarlane 2000: 76. Similarly described “coarse pink gypsum” is found on Ihy/dut’s sarcophagus as a background for an inscription (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003: 41). For instances of white coating on ceramic forms, see **Table A2** (Appendix, pp. 271-73).

	<p>whitewashed with gypsum prior to construction of the niche” (which likely held a statue) (ibid. 25).</p> <p>Niche and mudbrick platform/bench in front of it: Exposed surfaces of platform are “plastered and whitewashed” (ibid.)</p>	
	<p>Limestone “offering basin”, southern end of room IA: All surfaces are “plastered” and Kaiemheset’s name and titles are inscribed on part of the rim (ibid. 26).</p>	<p>No mention of the colour of the plaster, but plaster unlikely for aesthetic reasons if basin is limestone. No mention of whether inscription is under or on top of plaster.</p>
	<p>Façade addition (second phase of construction) – pillared hall on east side of façade: Coated in “tafel mortar”, “tafel plaster”, and “whitewashed with gypsum” (ibid. 26)</p>	
	<p>Serdabs – rooms IB (first phase of construction) and ID (second phase): Serdab IB’s walls have “whitewash” on top of mud and <i>tafla</i> plasters; serdab ID’s walls coated with <i>tafla</i> plaster and then “whitewashed” (ibid. 26-27).</p>	
	<p>Further façade addition (third phase of construction) – chamber on east side of façade: All walls including niches in north wall have evidence of “mud plaster coated with a layer of hard white gypsum” (ibid. 28).</p>	
Kaiemsenu	–	–
Merefnebef	<p>Exterior of mastaba: Outer faces of the walls are “painted white” on top of layers of mud and <i>tafla</i> mortar (Myśliwiec et al. 2004: 54).</p>	
	<p>Façade of west chapel: A band 0.16m high, underneath the decorated area, is “painted white” (ibid. 86).</p>	<p>Perhaps a space left undecorated between the floor and the decorated portion of the façade, yet prepared in the same way as the decorated surfaces – unfinished parts of the decoration exhibit the same background (see ibid. 85).</p>

	Entrance thresholds: Threshold of entrance to Court 2 (and whole complex) “covered with mortar and whitewashed” (ibid. 63).	
	West chapel, entrance doorway thicknesses: boat imagery found here “entirely overlaid with a thick layer of white gypsum” (ibid. 86).	
	Burial chamber: Walls bear “traces of whitewash”; likewise the sarcophagus and its lid exhibit “traces of whitewash” (ibid. 55).	
	Court 1a: Floor coated with mud and “painted white, at least inside the entrance niche”; offering installation in the west wall of Court 1a has a false door and niche, both coated with “multiple thick layers of whitewash” and the area in front of the door, which acted as an offering table, has “several layers of whitewash” (ibid. 62).	
	West chapel: A 0.35m high “band of white paint”, on top of mortar and gypsum, runs around the base of the walls, including the bottom of the northern false door (the southern false door ends above the band) (ibid. 92-93).	Perhaps, as with the façade, it is a zone left intentionally blank beneath the decorated areas.
	West chapel: The two offering tables and the bench are coated with “multiple thick layers of white plaster almost completely obscuring their decoration” (ibid. 61).	
	East chapel: Mud floor is coated with “several layers of coating, traces of which are also visible on the walls” (i.e. from repainting the floor) (ibid. 56).	
Mereruka	—	—
Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep	—	—
Nikauisesi	Room III (offering chapel), offering platform with <i>htp</i> motif on surface: Top surface coated with “fine gypsum plaster” (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 27). East face of offering platform: Sections at each end are “smoothed and plastered to the floor with white gypsum” (ibid. 28).	Although the tomb publication does not mention the colour of the coating, I observed this to be white when I visited the tomb. The unpainted area on the face of the platform likely had a stela, set of steps, or other object placed against it (ibid.

		28).
	Room III, bench on north wall: The top, the bases on which it sits, and the niche underneath all “mortared and coated... with a thick coat of gypsum plaster” (ibid. 28).	I observed this coating to be white when I visited the tomb.
	Room IV (storage room), bench on north wall: Top and edge bears “remnants of a thin white gypsum” (ibid. 29).	
Nyankhnefertem	—	—
Seankhuiptah	Tomb façade: Top coat of “whitewash” over mud plaster visible on east wall (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998: 43).	The east wall of the façade contains six niches, one of which features a serdab viewing slit (ibid.)
	Room I (offering chapel): Limestone walls and ceiling blocks covered with “hard white plaster” (ibid. 44).	The plaster is preparation for the decoration placed on top (see ibid. 62). There is a barrel vault of brick above the ceiling blocks (ibid. 43).
	Room II: Brick walls have a “thin layer of a hard creamy whitewash” on top of mud plaster (ibid. 44).	There is no decoration preserved on top of the plaster in this room (ibid.)
	Burial chamber (accessed from shaft 2): Walls not smoothed, but bear remnants of “coarse creamy-white plaster” (ibid. 46).	
Ty	—	—

Table A2: Summary of offering-related ceramics and vessels of other materials from the selected tombs

Tomb owner(s)	Ceramics finds
Akhethotep and his son, Ptahhotep II	No ceramics finds reported.
Ankhmahor	Firth and Gunn report finding “small alabaster model jars and saucers” on the floor of the burial chamber (Kanawati and Hassan 1997: 72, citing Firth and Gunn 1926: vol. 1, 18, figs. 10-11; vol. 2, pls. 13:D, 14:2). No others are mentioned in the re-publication (Kanawati and Hassan 1997).
Ihy (re-used by Idut)	No finds mentioned in re-publication (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2003). Macramallah reports finding “...en c une quinzaine de vases en terre cuite rouge foncé” on the floor of the store room and in the rubble (1935: 5).
Irukhaptah	Deep niche on east wall of chapel (almost facing false door) contained broken “rough hand-made pottery” that was scattered over its floor (De Rachewiltz 1960: 7, 28-29, fig. 6, pls. XXVI-XXVIII). No finds from the burial apartments are mentioned in the original excavation report. No others are mentioned in the re-publication (McFarlane 2000).
Kaiemheset	During re-excavation, pottery jars and bowls were found in burial shaft and burial chamber: seven model jars (four types in total); 13 shallow model dishes; and 25 deep model dishes (McFarlane 2003: 44-49). Firth and Gunn do not report any ceramic finds. Quibell and Hayter (1927: 18-19) report a hollow hourglass-shaped pot stand (0.23m high) found in the pillared hall, and in the debris, fragments of a wooden box and two offering ‘basins’ (one is in situ in the offering chapel – the location of the other is unknown).
Kaiemsenu	Nothing found in his burial shaft and chamber during re-clearance (McFarlane 2003), but Firth and Gunn report finding three tall storage jars of Old Kingdom type against the middle of the burial chamber’s east wall (1926: 34, 169, fig. 41). A second shaft and chamber here probably belong to Werdjed-Ptah, the owner of a false door in the chapel (his relation to Kaiemsenu is unclear). Nothing was found during re-clearance, but Firth and Gunn found 31 model vessels (30 model saucers and one model jar of ‘brown ware’) (ibid. 34, not illustrated).
Merefnebef	Finds both in the superstructure (west chapel and east chapel) as well as the burial shaft, burial chamber and ‘ritual’ shaft. <u>Burial chamber</u> : two jars filled with mud; two plates; one bowl; one <i>stt</i> bread form; sherds of beer jars (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2004: 205-206). <u>Burial shaft 1</u> : had been emptied and fill displaced westwards, but large quantity of sherds of beer jars and some sherds of <i>bdj</i> bread forms indicate hundreds of vessels likely present originally in shaft; also two beer jars with ashes inside and plugged with stoppers (ibid. 206-207).

	<p><u>Ritual shaft 1bis</u>: (not plundered). There were 34 items once recomposed from sherds: four plates; one <i>Meidum</i> bowl; five large bowls with modelled rims; 18 carinated bowls with rims of various shapes; five carinated bowls with spout rims. Near the shaft, on top of SE corner of mastaba, two red-slipped bowls and one red-slipped plate (once recomposed from sherds) found (ibid. 207-208).</p> <p><u>West (main) chapel</u>: three bell-shaped bowls and two rim fragments of such bowls; ceramic stoppers; miniature vessels (also in the courtyards); beer jars; four tall pot stands and part of a fifth, all with whitewash on exterior and part of interior. One found <i>in situ</i> on the altar in front of the southern false door (ibid. 208-209).</p> <p><u>East chapel</u>: mixed with sherds from shaft 1. Sherds of beer jars; fragments of three bowls bearing traces of whitewash (one is a late 6th Dynasty example) (ibid. 209).</p> <p><u>Areas of burning</u>: patches of burning and burnt remains were found in the upper court (no. 2) of Merefnebef's complex, with an almost identical combination of burnt remains found in two jars that likely originate from the burial shaft (Shaft 1). The ashes inside these jars, when tested, were found to be plant remains, bones, charcoal, and sherds of red-slipped open vessels (possibly bowls) (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2004: 206-207; Rzeuska 2006: 468-480).</p>
Mereruka	<p>Burial chamber was plundered, but Firth and Gunn report some relevant finds: set of alabaster canopic jars; alabaster vessels and a handled vessel; large red granite jar 0.52m high; two circular alabaster offering tables; one rectangular alabaster offering table; "a quantity" of small model jars and dishes of alabaster and limestone; inscribed alabaster bowl; alabaster ring-stand and a large jar of red painted ware – all were in fragments except for the large red granite jar (1926: 24-26, figs. 20-22, pls. 12C, 13B).</p>
Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep	<p>No ceramics finds reported.</p>
Nikauisesi	<p>14 ceramic jars, spouted jars, and basins (or fragments thereof), four limestone canopic jar lids, and limestone model jars (9 varieties), calcite model jars (ten varieties), three model metal jars (one in fragments) were discovered in the burial chamber (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2000: 61-67, pls. 36, 70-73).</p>
Nyankhnefertem	<p><u>Courtyard (shared by three chapels, including Nyankhnefertem's)</u> (Myśliwiec and Kuraszkiewicz 2010: 218-220): three layers of fill. Specific provenance of material is unclear, but it is likely from burial shafts of neighbouring complexes plundered in antiquity. Beer jars dominate, some with ashes or burnt organic remains inside, some whitewashed; various other types of jars; fragments of 'false' fillings (Nile silt); stoppers; bread forms and miniature vessels; animal bones and charcoal; bowls (some with burning on outside); plates; platters.</p> <p><u>Chapel 15</u> (ibid. 220-222): SW corner – part of this fill is from the same deposit as in the courtyard, so similar ceramics finds. Part of an imported Canaanite jar with whitewash on outside was found. The second (upper) layer of fill in the SW corner is very mixed: various types of beer jars, some bottoms of jars with traces of ashes; bread trays</p>

	<p>and moulds; red-slipped plates and bowls (some blackened on outside); charcoal; animal bones; one jar with mud 'false filling'. Northern area – material of this fill came from shaft 89 (secondary and not belonging to Nyankhnefertem, so not considered here).</p> <p><u>Shaft 77 and Shaft 52</u> (ibid. 222-224): these were re-used. The ceramics finds date to the reign of Pepy II and post-date Nyankhnefertem's burial.</p> <p><u>Areas of burning</u>: on the floor of the chapel (Chapel 15), in front of the northern false door, burnt patches (c.30-35cm diameter) and remains consisting of burnt pottery fragments (red-slipped bowls), ashes, charcoal, animal bones and burnt plant remains were found (ibid. 221). Two further patches of burning were found outside the chapel entrance (Chapel 15) and another three near the entrance to Chapel 16 (ibid. 83).</p>
Seankhuiptah	No finds reported (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998).
Ty	No ceramics finds reported.